

[From Haviland, John B. Ethnographic Afterward. In *Milbi: Aboriginal Tales from Queensland's Endeavour River*. Told and illustrated by Tulo Gordon. Translation and ethnographic afterward by John B. Haviland. Pp. 53-59. Canberra: Australian National University Press. (1979).]

Tulo Gordon is an Australian Aboriginal from the Hopevale Mission, near Cooktown on the Cape York Peninsula in northern Queensland. His people, speakers of the Guugu Yimidhirr language, once occupied a large area stretching from the Annan River northwards to the Starcke River, and inland for more than sixty miles. The stories translated in this book are Tulo's versions of traditional tales from his native territory. The stories mostly centre around the Endeavour River, whose mouth forms Cooktown harbour. These tales give accounts of the formation of prominent features of local geography, or the origins and habits of local species of plant and animal. On the other hand, the stories provide moral lessons about proper social order among Guugu Yimidhirr people in traditional times.

The people who produced these tales lived in a rich and complex environment, both natural and social. Their stories represent a striking intellectual and aesthetic effort to bring natural facts into harmony with a human order. More importantly, this collection of stories, told and illustrated by an individual like Tulo Gordon, represents another sort of an effort at reconciliation: Tulo Gordon has recalled tales from an era of Aboriginal life long-since vanished, and he has recast them in words and pictures that derive from a life still current. The stories survive, then, as a legacy from a Guugu Yimidhirr society obliterated by the European invasion of its territory, passed on to the Aboriginal descendants of that society, now living in a drastically altered world. Like other Australian Aborigines the Guugu Yimidhirr people of the Endeavour River area lived · by hunting and gathering. They were accomplished at spearing and trapping game, large and small, as well as fish. They used a variety of spears, each tailored to specific sorts of prey, with different wood or stems as shafts and a wide range of materials -bone, rock, quartz, stingaree barbs, and so on – as spearheads. They used a broad spear-thrower, called a *milbiir*, shaped something like a sword with a hook, to give added force and leverage to the throw. They had as well a detailed knowledge of edible plants, and of the seasonal rhythm that governed, among other things, the ripening of yams, the maturing of the edible water-lily root, the profusion of the wild plums, or the annual return of *thuga*, the scrub hen, to her permanent nest to lay eggs.

The entire area inhabited by the Guugu Yimidhirr people could be thought of as divided into small territories, each with its own name, and containing distinctive named places. Each territory had, also, a principal family - a group of brothers, perhaps, with their wives and children, or an older man with a collection of offspring, both married and unmarried - who 'belonged to that place'. Such people had first claim to the native foods that grew in the territory, as well as proprietary rights to its sacred places. For example, Tulo Gordon's father - and hence Tulo himself, although he has in his lifetime never had the opportunity to exercise his rights - 'belonged' to an area called Nugal Jin.gurr. Nugal is a mountain between the right and left branches of the Endeavour River known in English as Mt Harris; the word *jin.gurr*, which means 'younger sister', distinguishes Tulo's country from Nugal Gaanhaal ('older sister'), which lies on the other side of the same mountain. Although his people cultivated and collected 'bush tucker', Tulo points out that they had both an intimate knowledge of what he calls 'nature' - the whereabouts of edible plants, their seasons, and virtues - and also exclusive rights to enjoy its fruits. It is because of such exclusive rights that Fog grows angry at the theft of his yam by Thunder; he is enraged by his son-in-law's digging a yam that grows on his land without his explicit permission.

There were also wider human or social needs that went beyond matters of food, and that transcended local territorial boundaries. Guugu Yimidhurr people from widely separated locales gathered together from time to time for ritual occasions. For example, large groups celebrated the transition of a group of youths into adulthood. Such initiation rituals were themselves connected with food: a time and place in which a certain yam was plentiful and mature was, for example, appropriate for the ritual which transformed boys into full men who were, in their new adulthood, for the first time permitted to eat that species of yam. When people gathered together for a large ceremony, which might last for weeks, it was no simple matter to feed the multitudes. Often the proceedings had to be suspended, as in the stories here about great dances, so that participants could take time to hunt and gather food.

According to Tulo Gordon, Aborigines in the early days were 'strictly law-abiding people' who 'had their own laws', particularly relating to marriage and proper demeanour. A man could be severely punished, even speared, not only for poaching on another's territory, but also for marrying 'crooked' - that is, marrying someone who was too closely related or who stood in the wrong sort of kinship relationship. In a kind of mock or symbolic battle, a man contracted to marry a woman, often when she was still a child, by subjecting himself to a lengthy beating by his prospective parents-in-law, receiving on the head several heavy blows with a spearthrower which left blood streaming down his face. People were also constrained from disrespectful behaviour with their in-laws, their parents, and blood relatives of the opposite sex. In the most extreme case, a man was not supposed to speak at all when his wife's mother was in earshot; ordinarily he avoided her presence altogether. There were also special polite words, used in place of ordinary Guugu Yimidhurr words when speaking with people who required special respect (a man's father-in-law, for instance). Breaches of etiquette, a disrespectful word, or a misplaced joke might, in Tulo's words, cause someone 'to pick up a spear and kill you one time'. Tulo recalls that people who transgressed rules of proper conduct, especially in relation to sexual affairs, were often given animal nicknames like 'dingo' or 'porcupine' to underline the fact that they had disregarded the laws governing human conduct and hence were more like animals than people. (In the honey story, Frill Lizard suffers when he incautiously handles his sister's *yirrb*, her skirt or loincloth, which subsequently becomes permanently stuck in his throat.) Serious transgressions wife-stealing or murder, for example - might also result in a ritual spearing; the culprit, defended only by a champion wielding a shield or spear-thrower, was encircled by a group of men who tried to spear him in the thigh or buttocks, if not to kill him outright.

On the other hand, a man who proved himself to be *burrba* - brave, strong, and a good hunter - might often have more than one wife. Frequently the parents of the first bride would give such a successful provider a second or third daughter. (In the stories, too, co-wives are usually portrayed as sisters.) A good hunter was called *mala minha* (which means something like 'adept at getting meat'), and such a man was clearly an asset not only to his immediate family but also to all the members of the group with whom he lived. For, as Tulo puts it, Aborigines used to live 'the commonest way': they shared food within a given group, each individual being entitled to some specified part of another's kill. Shares were not necessarily equal, however, and although women accounted for a large part of a family's food with their gathering activities, a good deal of the larder found its way into senior male stomachs. (The old woman, given a supply of food and left behind to die, in the story, seems to represent an actual practice in traditional Guugu Yimidhurr society. However, as the old woman who summoned the supernatural

snakes demonstrates, in another story, not all women and children given the leftovers and bones were satisfied with their treatment.)

Foods of different types were also subject to dietary laws, some species being reserved for certain classes of people (only initiated men, for example, could eat a particular type of white yam), or prohibited to certain classes (e.g., pregnant women). The way in which game was killed also affected its edibility. Tulo remembers, as a lad, watching an older brother surrender a giant barramundi because he had mistakenly speared it with his uncle's sjlear. As a result, according to Tulo's mother, none of them could eat it, and an elder man in the camp made a feast of it all by himself.

Not surprisingly, for a people who depended for their existence on a detailed knowledge of their surroundings, Guugu Yimidhurr people were (and still are) marvellously observant and well-informed about the physical environment, master bushmen who note subtle differences between species of plants and animals and who know how to take advantage of their particular properties or habits. They distinguish, for instance, hundreds of varieties of fish, stingrays, birds, marsupials, and lizards. Consider some of the reptiles that figure in the stories: for example, the *mungurru*, or bush python. Compared to the *gabul*, or carpet snake, *mungurru* is less brightly-coloured and 'less cheeky'; it won't bite! Both snakes are strong and determined hunters who will cause small birds to set up a commotion, to 'laugh' a sure sign by which men know that the snake is near. Among the poisonous snakes, which abound in north Queensland, although none is as poisonous as the *biigaar*, the taipan, people reckon *walanggarr* the death adder to be the most deadly. Rather than taking flight when disturbed, this snake tends to hide itself in sand, waiting, almost invisibly, to bite an unwary foot. (Walanggarr thus is the appropriate choice, in the story, to watch from his hiding place when the two Dugul sisters sneak off to drink their water in secret.) Another talented reptilian spy is the ubiquitous Frill Lizard, a peculiar-looking animal (whose swollen neck, we recall, derives from his greedily swallowing his sister's loin-covering, dipped in honey). When you try to catch a glimpse of him on a tree, he always scurries to the opposite side, keeping his frills flattened and his legs down, so as to stay out of sight. Perhaps the most imposing reptile of all, around the Endeavour River, is the *ganhaarr*, the salt-water crocodile. Guugu Yimidhurr people considered him to be almost human, travelling great distances from one river mouth to another, fiendishly clever, strong and dangerous, preying, as in the story, particularly on women whom he desired as brides. In the early days there were crocodile-hunting specialists, who dared to dive into a known crocodile's haunt to wrestle with him and kill him. Even in recent times people have lost their lives to crocodiles, and Aborigines talk of the creatures with respect.

The Guugu Yimidhurr people exploited their environment with simple but often ingenious technology. The raw materials were all around. Different woods had individual virtues: some were especially hard, suitable for clubs and spear-throwers; some wood was strong and could be straightened in the fire to make a spear; the soft wood of the *hula!* tree was ideal for firesticks. *Midal*, the lawyer-cane, had useful (and often inescapable) barbs; the *yuulnga* nut contained a stringy fibre for twine; tea-tree bark made excellent tinder and versatile wrapping material; a pointed kangaroo bone was the perfect needle or spear-tip; a clump of *baaydyin*, a coarse grass, served as a sponge for sopping up soup or wild honey; and so on. Before Europeans invaded the territory, Guugu Yimidhurr people did not boil food, but used instead a variety of complex cooking techniques. Large game was often roasted in an earth oven, called a *gurrma*, which used hot stones and red-hot chunks of clay from ant-beds for heat. On to these was piled the meat, and the whole was covered with leaves and dirt. Smaller game, as well as cakes or pudding-like foods made from yams, nuts or grain, were cooked in the ashes of the fire. Preparing some

foods, for example the *badhuurr* nut from the *zamia* palm, involved days of pounding and rinsing out toxic juices, before the pulp could be formed into a cake and roasted. (No wonder the spirit in the story was so jealous of his store of cakes, not wanting the water rat to steal them away after he had spent so long in their preparation.)

Taking advantage of the resources the land offered required extensive knowledge of terrain and territory. In the rainy season, one needed to locate shelter and fuel; in the dry, one had to know about permanent sources of fresh water. Significantly, many sites mentioned in these Guugu Yimidhurr stories are places where fresh water is to be found: swamps, springs, a waterfall, and main camping places along the rivers and creeks. Other places have remarkable features for which the stories give accounts: around the waterfall where the water rat lived are great stones, in the shape of cubes, which appear almost to have been cut by hand and stacked one on top of the other like so many gigantic cakes. Are these, perhaps, the remains of the wudhi's stockpile of zamia cakes? At Nobby Point, where in the story the bush python is petrified by the sun, the rock shows a curious scale-like formation, and walking along the point is, indeed, something like . treading on the back of an enormous serpent.

These stories also deal with some of the less tangible entities in the Guugu Yimidhurr universe. Tulo remembers from his childhood hearing about many different kinds of ghost and spirit, some denizens of forest and scrub, others frequenting water. Spirits of dead people, called *wudhi*, were particularly dangerous, capable of possessing human beings and driving them into mad frenzies or fatal depressions. Another female ghost, called *dyiliburu*, travelled about with a basket, reaching out with her long rubbery arm to snatch unguarded infants from their mother's very laps. Forest spirits, like the *diimuur* with his ten beautiful daughters, could also trap unwary hunters, calling them from the treetops, and causing them to throw their spears wildly or injure living human beings. Other creatures, less man than beast, also populated the scrub. There were: terrifying monsters like the *manu-galga-dhir* (the 'spear throat'), hapless humans transformed into great hulking globs of flesh, capable of emitting thunderous roars and thumping the earth so loudly that trees shook and the ground trembled. Supernatural forces appear and reappear in Tulo's tales. The curse has a peculiar power, and just as an old witch can, in the stories, blow on her victim's ear to produce a transformation, cave paintings in Tulo's home country depict men or women 'with a funny kind of a face, or a funny kind of a leg or foot'. Such a painting, Tulo remarks, was 'going to make that man sick'. Guugu Yimidhurr people do not now paint such figures, but many still express a healthy respect for the possible efficacy of a spoken curse or a verbal charm.

The supernatural creature that appears most often in these stories is called *yirmbal*. Tulo has explained to me that 'yirmbal could be anything': a giant snake or eel, a huge fish, an enormous shark, or perhaps something more nebulous, a shapeless creature that inhabits and protects a waterhole, a swamp, a mountain or an outcropping of rock. Sites known to be inhabited by yirmbal were dangerous, and in some sense sacred to the people who belonged to the territory involved. At Nobby Point, where the great python turned to rock, Aboriginal fishermen in the early days used to speak in a whisper, asking the yirmbal who inhabited that place to guide their turtle-hunting efforts. The creatures protected an area, but were liable as well to send punishment to human evildoers. A camp to the north of Cape Flattery, in the Guugu Yimidhurr area, was known by older men in Tulo's youth to have been obliterated, literally swallowed up by an angry yirmbal displeased by the inhabitants' faults and misdeeds.

Tulo Gordon's stories derive, then, from this universe, divided socially and geographically, peopled by human beings and other creatures. Most of the stories depict a time, long in the past, when, as Guugu

Yimidhirr tradition has it, *all* living creatures were human, to be changed one at a time into animals, birds, spirits, or heavenly bodies, as a result of their deeds and propensities.

Some of the stories Tulo learned as a child from his mother or auntie, some from his older brother, the late Major Mango, who spent a long time as a boy in the company of 'free' Aborigines in the bush. Others he heard, as he grew up on the Lutheran Mission at Cape Bedford, from old men from different parts of the territory, men like old William, Darkan, Barney, or Charlie Burns, Charlie Maclean or old George Bowen.

In Guugu Yimidhirr these tales are called *milbi*, a word that signifies not only a traditional story or legend, but also a piece of news, a tidbit of gossip, or an account of recent or past events. And although Tulo heard many of these tales at his mother's knee, they are clearly something more than children's stories: they were meant to entertain and edify adults as well, to point to social morals, or to surround familiar places and things with an aura of significance and a depth of tradition. More than this, these stories *belong* to a place and a people in a way that goes far beyond our attachment to fairy tales. Not only do they spring from the Guugu Yimidhirr landscape, but they represent an era of the past of Tulo's people that no longer exists, and, indeed, that survives only as a childhood memory for the oldest people still alive today. For a people whose culture was dismantled, whose land was taken, and whose lives were, as we shall see, deformed and carefully controlled by a conquering, alien European population, these stories represent a link with an Aboriginal world now vanished. What is more, the stories make sense; they still work. Tulo, marvelling at the logic and clarity of the tales, often remarks on how clever the old people were to put such stories together. The stories 'go straight through' and 'they make you think'. The Aboriginal creation of a world in which animals talked, hunted, ate, and married like men is, Tulo says, something which he is sure Aborigines 'didn't pick up out of white man's ways'.

Still, it must be clear that the stories we have written down here, really come 'from the past'; in Tulo's words they are 'as told to me, not by book, but by spoken words'. These tales are not some mystical, sacred tribal property, nor are Tulo's versions the only full, true, or correct ones. They represent one man's collection, learned from many people, often in only fragmentary or half-remembered form, then embellished or regularised in Tulo Gordon's head. Many tales from the Endeavour River have counter parts elsewhere in Australia. Tulo knows, for example, that stories about the origin of water (here hidden by two turtle sisters) or a ferocious giant dingo dog (in the Ouugu Yimidhirr version owned by an ill-tempered python) are 'spread right over' northern Australia. One danger in writing the stories down here is that they will be taken as more than they are meant to be: just one selection of good stories that belong to Guugu Yimidhirr *bama*. We have left out many other good stories, that tell how Moon murdered his own son, or how the grasshopper, the grass, and the water became friends, or how the *balin.ga* (porcupine) got his quills: spears thrown by his irate kinsmen after he made improper advances towards his own sister.

Although in the English versions we have tried to keep both elements of Guugu Yimidhirr storytelling style and the special flavour of both Guugu Yimidhirr and Hopevale English phrases, there is a fundamental difference between a story, written, punctuated, and spaced on a printed page, and a tale enacted by a gifted storyteller (like Tulo Gordon), complete with dialogue, drama, and sound-effects. These stories are meant to be heard, and Guugu Yimidhirr people deserve to have them recorded and published in their own language. Needless to say, the translations draw as heavily upon Tulo Gordon's English as on his Guugu Yimidhirr.

This book, however, represents something more than a collection of stories from a group of Australian Aborigines. For, whatever the original contexts in which these stories were told, and whatever the

interdependencies between these tales and traditional Guugu Yimidhirr society and environment, the present collection represents a rather different expression of Aboriginal life, in a modern context. It is in fact miraculous that the stories (and the story-teller) have survived at all, let alone the community of Guugu Yimidhirr people to which they belong. The fragmentary nature of the collection, the hybrid language in which the stories are retold, and the salvaged remnants of tradition and lore around which they revolve all give forlorn testimony to the fate of the original inhabitants of the Endeavour River. Tulo Gordon's own life can stand as a kind of miniature history of the restructuring of Aboriginal life in the Guugu Yimidhirr area.

Tulo Gordon was born about 1922 in a camp on the Endeavour, up river from Cooktown. His father, Charlie, was the last of several brothers and sisters from Nugal Dyin.gurr to survive the invasion of his territory by gold miners, sugar planters, settlers, beche-de-mer fishermen, and policemen, and to remain in his homeland. Tulo's mother Minnie came from an area called *Dyuubi* (known in English as Boiling Springs). She was known by the name of her long-time employer, a settler named Gordon. She worked for years, before and after Tulo was born, sweeping house, washing clothes, and doing other domestic chores for white people around Cooktown. Old Charlie had been a handyman, a stockman, a goatherd, a police tracker, a labourer in the cane fields, and, as Tulo says, was 'well-known to white people'. But Tulo's family was not tied, as were many local Aborigines, to a particular property or station; they still moved from place to place, camping for some months with other Guugu Yimidhirr people at 'Two-Mile' on the Cooktown-Laura railway line, moving up the river to Stonewall and other camps, or across the wide mouth of the Endeavour River to the North Shore Reserve, where Aborigines who laboured during the day in Cooktown were sent to camp at night after the curfew banned them from town. Cooktown was by this time only a skeleton of the goldrush boom town of the 1880s that grew up to serve miners bound for the Palmer River goldfields.

When Tulo was born, his father, though still given on occasion to going 'on the walkabout', had begun to work regularly for the Lutheran Mission at Cape Bedford, some fifteen miles up the coast from Cooktown. The Mission had begun a cattle operation at an outstation called Spring Hill. Tulo's family lived in a bark shelter, while his father and the white stockman rode the fences, and rescued stock from bogs, swamps, and cattle-duffing neighbours. Tulo's older brother Major and two sisters were already living permanently at the Mission, called Hope Valley, boarding at the school. Tulo's playmates were children from other nearby camps. Sometimes a boy from Bridge Creek, another camp on the mission reserve where non-Lutheran Aborigines were allowed to take refuge from the outside world, would spend time with Tulo's family. At the North Shore camp Tulo swam and played, and occasionally saw traditional dances, in the company of police trackers' children. People in the camps went hunting and fishing and gathered seasonal foods in the bush. But Tulo remembers most fondly the bread and rough cane syrup that he could wheedle at North Shore from people who earned money in Cooktown.

Life was uncertain for Aborigines around Cooktown at that time. Adults were free to roam about the land in search of game and food only so long as their movements did not annoy the settlers and their stock. Fishing boats landed randomly up and down the coast recruiting and abducting boys and women from Aboriginal camps. Aborigines were tolerated around settlements, or mining camps, and indeed were encouraged to work by white people, but only so long as they were tractable. Offenders were ushered from the area by police, deported to penal settlements in the south, where they would no longer be subject to the bad influences of their 'habitual haunts'. Thus did it come about that Tulo's uncles and aunts one by one disappeared from his world, as did the parents of his young mates. Those adults who remained increasingly sought refuge on the reserve controlled by the Lutherans, where the supply of flour, tea, sugar and tobacco was less reliable than on the outside, but where Aborigines could live with some small measure of autonomy.

Aboriginal children had fewer options. By the late 1920s, Tulo remembers, policemen used to go out to the camps and stations to find Aboriginal children of school age. Policemen 'used to muster 'em round and send 'em in the Mission'. The missionary at Cape Bedford accepted young children from the entire Cooktown area (and, indeed, from distant parts of Queensland as well), fed and clothed them, educated them, and brought them up as hardworking and serious Christians. Tulo and some of his age mates from Bridge Creek and North Shore were rounded up and deposited at the mission in the late 1920s. Throughout this period, police brought in children from the mining camps and sparse settlements further afield: from Laura and Coen to the West, from Port Stewart, Barrow Point, and Princess Charlotte Bay to the North. These children said good-bye forever to camp existence as they had known it, beginning instead a carefully regimented life of study, work, and worship.

The Lutheran mission at Hope Valley had been founded in 1886 by German missionaries, delayed on their way to New Guinea. After forty years of hard and determined efforts, the missionaries had created an enclave of Lutheran discipline, isolated in every way possible from outside society, both white and black. Many of the inmates, some part-European, were orphans or children forcibly separated from their parents before being sent to the mission. Others, like Tulo, only saw their parents on occasions when the dwindling numbers of camp people visited Cape Bedford for rations or work. The remaining children were mission-born, living at school while their parents worked at outstations. In any case, Tulo joined a society strictly divided into age groups, and carefully structured along Lutheran principles. The oldest Aboriginal people lived off the mission entirely or in small camps on mission territory but carefully segregated from the small Hope Valley congregation. Older Lutheran Aborigines, pupils from the early days of the mission, who had married other converts, worked the farm and fishing enterprises at mission outstations. The children formed groups according to their level in school: the oldest children who had finished their studies formed different work gangs. Other classes in school were hierarchically organised, older students supervising younger ones, and all under the strict and watchful eyes of the missionary and his family.

Tulo Gordon remained in school until 1938. He learned all the ordinary subjects taught in a rural Queensland school of that era: reading, arithmetic, poetry, spelling, composition. (Aboriginal children off the mission were lucky to receive any schooling at all.) He and his fellow pupils were diligent students of the Bible, accomplished at singing hymns in Guugu Yimidjirr. Tulo also learned about hard work, in the mission gardens and coconut plantations, and later on the mission boat, diving for trochus shell and beebe-de-mer. And it was at school, first following his brother Major's lead, and later encouraged by the schoolteacher, that Tulo began to paint. He drew animals and boats with charcoal on bark or driftwood. Later he used tins of paint, washed up on the beach, with homemade brushes. Encouraged in his early efforts, Tulo occasionally gave his sketches to other people at the mission who used them, along with Lutheran Bible pictures, to decorate their walls.

In 1942, the superintendent of the mission, a man in his seventies who had been at Cape Bedford continuously since he arrived from Germany in 1887, was arrested by the army and interned in a camp for German aliens. The inmates of the mission, seemingly contaminated by their contact with German missionaries, were summarily packed onto boat and train and evacuated en masse, and without warning, to Woorabinda, a settlement near Rockhampton. There they had, for the first time, unmediated exposure to Aboriginal life in a white man's world.

Tulo went out to work on wartime manpower gangs, picking peanuts, harvesting arrowroot, cutting cane. The Cooktown people also fell victim to the diseases of colder climates. Tulo himself lay near death for several weeks in a Cherbourg hospital. Many of his countrymen succumbed: Tulo's brother Major had three children die of fever in the space of two days, in early 1943. Nearly a quarter of the Cape Bedford people died, and the nature of the community, always heavily dependent on kinship and family relations, was drastically altered as entire families were snuffed out.

At Woorabinda Tulo Gordon tried his hand at a variety of new things. He tried the guitar; he played football; and he continued to paint. When a new mission was opened at Hopevale, near Cooktown, the Cape Bedford people who had survived went north again. Tulo devoted himself to a new life in his own country, a life with changed rules. He built a house with his own hands (a house he still rents from the Queensland government), planted fruit trees and gardens (on land the mission apportioned), married a woman from Palm Island (where he and some other single men were (dispatched by the authorities to find wives), and raised a family. (Tulo and his wife Gertie have had eight children, of whom seven are alive.)

But life at Hopevale is often onerous for Tulo and his countrymen. His brother Major Mango (who died shortly after the manuscript for this book was completed) was always restless at the mission, trying repeatedly to gain exemption from Queensland's repressive Aboriginal legislation. Tulo found the possibilities for employment at the mission restrictive and unrewarding. He again put his talents to work, producing carved wooden curios for sale at the mission shop. He tried bark paintings (which he does with his left hand) and landscapes (which he does with his right). With these bark paintings, not native to the Guugu Yimidhirr area at all, Tulo developed the style illustrated in this book. He began to reach into the stock of traditional tales that he and others at Hopevale remembered, depicting the old stories on bark, often writing summaries of them on pieces of paper and pasting them to the backs of the paintings.

This book is thus a natural outgrowth of Tulo's own effort to recapture and represent his people's stories in a modern context, rather far removed from his own life of fifty years ago, to say nothing of Guugu Yimidhirr society as it was before white men destroyed it. Just as the Guugu Yimidhirr storyteller used these tales to connect the natural and social world as he experienced it to a past moral order as he conceived of it, Tulo Gordon here presents bits of his own people's traditions to connect modern Hopevale with a distinctly Aboriginal past, a past cleansed of imposed European ways. But this book is clearly a product of the present. Hopevale Mission exists. What becomes of the Guugu Yimidhirr people, and of Aborigines in Queensland and throughout Australia, is a story that people like Tulo Gordon must have the right to compose and tell for themselves.