



ABOVE: EARLY MORNING, MUTITJULU ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY, ULURU  
 RIGHT: UNCLE BOB RANDALL

# 'Two-way learning'

- walking in each other's shoes

## text and images *Kia Mistilis*

**T**wo-way learning,' or 'walking in each other's shoes' are the words of Aboriginal elder Bob Randall, which emerge as a central theme of *Kanyini*, the landmark documentary film which premiered at Sydney Film Festival in June 2006.

With their united vision and commitment to putting that principle into action, Bob Randall and Director Melanie Hogan have continued to collaborate since the film's worldwide release, initiating educational programs connected to the film which are both innovative and accessible at the grass roots level across Australia. Their belief that education has the power to change attitudes when the opportunity is provided is inspiring. But first, the inspiration of *Kanyini*.

*Kanyini* illuminates the culture of the Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Luritja peoples

of the central desert in the early part of the 20th century. Archival footage reveals a peoples who were strong and healthy, at one with their environment and living an intact traditional life. The film explores the origins of their contact with Europeans, the massive impacts of colonisation and its many legacies that still reverberate today.

As contemporary Australians we live in a culture characterised by misunderstanding, or lack of understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of Australia, which flows from this original disconnection between two vastly different cultures. At the heart of complex problems that persist in characterising relations between the two cultures is our ongoing struggle as a nation to truly move forward from the past. *Kanyini* reminds us that we first need to face the past in order to create a better future. This film is ground breaking because it shines a light on dark aspects of our history, and reveals wounds in order



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TWO-WAY LEARNING - MUTITJULU ELDER BARBARA TJIKATU, (OA) HANDS ELLIOTT HIS FIRST WITCHETTY GRUB DURING A CULTURAL WORKSHOP ON ABORIGINAL LANDS, ULURUA

to suggest solutions – how we as individuals and as a community can chart the pathways of healing.

Uncle Bob, himself a member of the stolen generations of Uluru, guides us through the historical relationship between two very different peoples, gently inviting us to witness history from an indigenous perspective. His ability to tell his people's story with unflinching honesty, humility and love gives the film its incredible accessibility to audiences from all walks of life.

Speaking to me at The Dreaming Festival, Australia's largest international cultural gathering of indigenous peoples, Uncle Bob shares his thoughts on how we can move forward together: "To heal we need to acknowledge what happened, and not deny it any more. The truth shall set us free. Not the hidden truth, the open truth. We Anangu people lived here, proud keepers of our country for thousands of years. We had a feeling of equality with all that was. The government took away that Kanyini, snipping the lines one by one. As the concepts were damaged, our connectedness, our sense of belonging and our responsibility were taken away. Today a lot of the old laws are contaminated and we are stuck between two worlds. Our black history has wounds so deep that we as modern people are feeling it. Our loss is your loss and we need to heal together, to listen and understand and try to make things right from now on.

Uncle Bob and Melanie believe that an essential aspect of making things right is giving voice to the silence surrounding the stories of indigenous peoples who were systematically removed from their families. In the process of illuminating

our little-told history, text appears on the screen during Kanyini, telling the audience that "between 1910 and 1970 approximately 50 000 Aboriginal children were taken from their families under government policy. They are known as the stolen generations". Uncle Bob and Melanie are now working towards the creation of an online museum of filmed testimonies from members of the stolen generations, with seed funding from Rio Tinto Aboriginal foundation. "No one is addressing the issue properly", Melanie says. "We want to facilitate recording of testimonies like Steven Spielberg did after he made Schindler's list. The Shoah foundation recorded 50 000 testimonies of holocaust survivors so that history can never be denied. We want to do the same thing with the stolen generations of Australia. The testimonies will be filmed by indigenous filmmakers a database of which is being established at present."

This is a part of two-way learning: walking in each other's shoes. Uncle Bob says


"I believe that education is one of the important methods of improving our relationship with each other. It helps break down the barriers so we can meet each other on common ground. Non-indigenous people need to understand our culture so we have a two-way learning and working together in action. And we need to become educated so we can function well in your system and use it to our benefit.

"Most of our people don't have the skills and education to succeed in this society. We need to find a new way of teaching which incorporates the old way and the new way so that our mob can feel

proud of themselves, our culture and love of the land. You have to be connected to all four lines (principles – see breakout box) to be whole. So we need to start building up dignity and responsibility by strengthening the lines one at a time. Restoring connectedness means strengthening the lines to family, land, belief system and spirituality, restoring belief in the traditional system, that it was good and had value. And it's not just for indigenous people, you can come with me. Thousands of years of culture we can share.

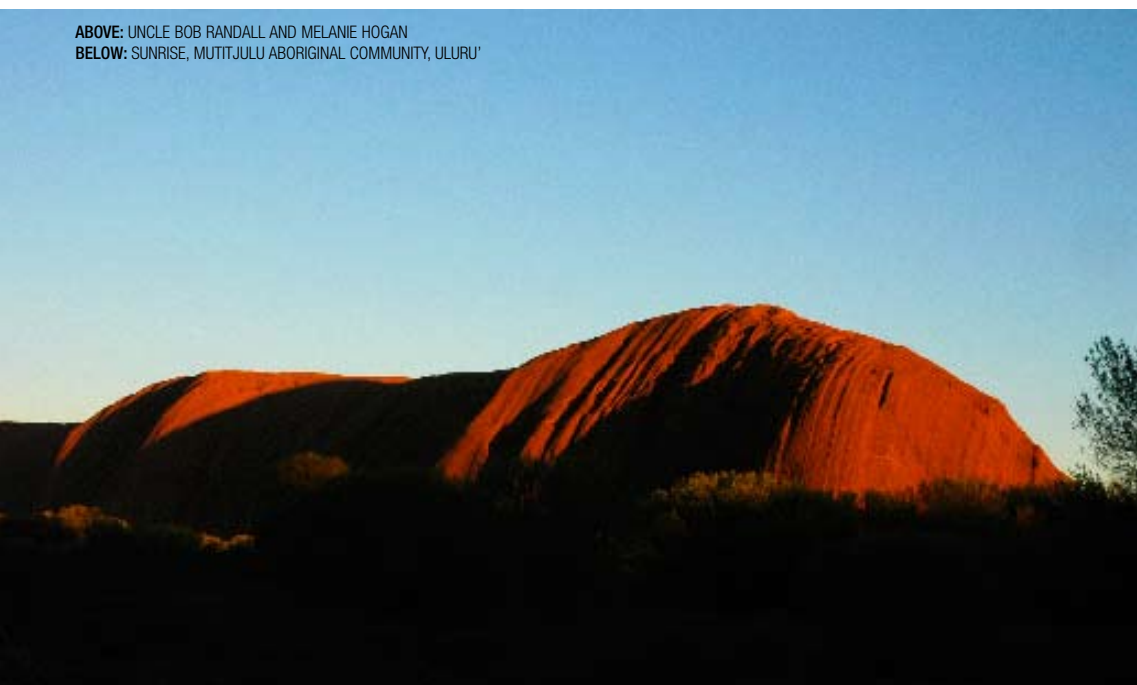
Since the release of Kanyini, more than 1000 Australian high schools and primary schools have purchased a DVD of Kanyini and interest is still growing. The website [www.kanyini.com](http://www.kanyini.com) is set up for any primary school, high school, TAFE or university to buy the film and download a free indigenous cultural study guide created in conjunction with the film, which is designed for face-to-face teaching in the classroom. "We want to use the film to make a difference. That's why we're targeting the educational sector of Australia and focusing on getting Kanyini into schools," Melanie says. "We want to create a platform which makes it easy for teachers to access and use our Kanyini education packs as part of their curriculum."

Uncle Bob and Melanie are currently in the early stages of creating another two-way learning initiative for schools, called Yarnup. They are finding 30 schools in NSW are to participate in a pilot program whereby student leaders facilitate a connection between their school and the local indigenous community. This will specifically

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ABOVE: UNCLE BOB RANDALL AND MELANIE HOGAN  
BELOW: SUNRISE, MUTTITJULU ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY, ULURU'



## KANYINI: THE FOUR PRINCIPLES

**Tjukurrpa:** Lore, belief system. Everything is one. Everything is connected. This is handed down as a guiding law and is fixed.

**Kurunpa:** Spirituality. Develop your own throughout your life. It is influenced by anything that is good to know and apply.

**Walytja:** Family, expanding outwards from one's human family to include relationships with all living things.

**Njura Land:** Home base. A sense of belonging.

*'Connection to the four lines gives you a sense of wholeness, of belonging. That sense of belonging carries with it a responsibility. Kanyini means 'love with responsibility'. These principles need to be actioned. They flow from the mind through thoughts and words, but come to life through action. You can apply Kanyini principles in your own life. Start from where you are now by applying unconditional love with your partner, family, friends, workmates, acquaintances. It spreads outward from you until you can talk to anybody anywhere in the world. Learning from each other means understanding and accepting differences. This is easier than you think. It is amazing to see when you get together there are far more similarities than differences. This makes a pathway or a bridge for better understanding and being together so our children can grow up closer together.'*  
Uncle Bob Randall.

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involve encouraging students to screen Kanyini, as well as bringing Indigenous culture into schools. Students will find out who local indigenous people are, and invite them to come and speak at their school and also initiate fund raising to support them to do so. The final element of Yarnup is for students to make a 5-minute film about the magic that happens in the meeting and shared experiences between local indigenous people and the school.

"This is bringing the Kanyini connection to the micro-level", says Melanie. "It is a proven reality that when non-indigenous people want to collaborate and learn on equal footing with indigenous people then magic happens. But we have to respect each other. I am convinced that in more than 200 years it hasn't worked because white people are carrying the wrong attitude. It's white fellas wanting to make black people white. Now there is an increased awareness that we have to question our values, that our culture doesn't

have all the answers. The beauty is in both cultures learning from each other with an open heart and open mind. It's a challenge, but we can do it. We can learn from each other and evolve together. We have a dream that one day right across Australia our schools will be creating short films about the relationships they are building in their local community."

Uncle Bob and Melanie are also in the process of establishing The Kanyini, Foundation "so we can continue to facilitate projects which encourage two-way learning between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians".

Two-way learning means putting into action the willingness to understand each other better, in the knowledge that together we can build the bridges of understanding and create a more healthy relationship between our cultures than we have managed as a nation so far. It's a way of coming together that we as Australians can all share in, regardless of our ethnicity, and it reminds us that as peoples of many nations living on the same continent, we all have a

part to play. As Uncle Bob says: "the earth is our mother, that makes you and me brother and sister".



NSW Schools wishing to register their interest in joining the Yarnup program, contact Shelley Pedersen at Reverb Films: [shelley.pedersen@yarnup.com.au](mailto:shelley.pedersen@yarnup.com.au) or call 02 9368 7857.

*Kia Mistilis is an independent journalist and photographer specialising in stories for news, documentary and Indigenous affairs. Since graduating from The College of Fine Arts, (University of New South Wales) in 1991, she has worked for print media, film, theatre and television both in Australia and overseas, documenting people and events in places as diverse as New York City, Uluru and the villages of East Timor. Kia also has over 16 years' experience in the community sector as a coordinator of projects and events in support of social justice, the arts and sustainable development. She has a particular interest for applying her skills to community projects with indigenous and ethnically diverse communities both in Australia and overseas.*