

Hakea Hustler & Carl Merrison

Media Kit

Author Bio

Carl Merrison

Mini Bio: WA Local Hero Finalist 2016 and respected Aboriginal role model, Carl Merrison was inspired to write by his work with Clontarf Foundation, Hawks football coach and his life growing up in a remote Kimberley town.

Short Bio: Western Australian Local Hero Finalist 2016, Carl Merrison was born in Wyndham in the Kimberley, and grew up in Halls Creek. Carl identifies as Jaru and Kija through his extended family on his mother's side- his maternal grandmother being a Stolen Generation victim. Carl adopted his nine year old son, Deklan, when he was just a few months old. Carl worked as a Clontarf Indigenous Mentor, pool manager and lifeguard, and volunteered to coach the local Hawks football team (with recent success stories of Sam Petrevski-Seton and Cedric Cox achieving 2016 top 30 AFL draft picks). More recently he helped coach the Lismore Swans' Women Team to victory.



Hakea Hustler

Mini Bio: Respected English teacher, Hakea has a passion for working with Aboriginal young people that was sparked by her volunteer work with the SWIRL program while at university- experiences that led to her collaboration with Carl and their latest book. Hakea is committed to Indigenous education with a particular focus on stories as learning, for understanding and empowerment.

Short Bio: Teacher and author, Hakea was born in Geelong, Victoria. Hakea spent 10 years in the care of her grandparents and overcame significant family disadvantage to succeed in her career and follow her passions. Hakea spent time volunteering with the Story Writing in Remote Locations (SWIRL) program while studying her Bachelor of Education degree at Victoria University. This experience sparked her passion to work with remote Aboriginal people. In 2013, Hakea and a friend moved to Halls Creek to work at the district high school.



The Hakea and Carl Collaboration

Hakea and Carl began dating in mid 2013 while Hakea was employed as a year 9 teacher. Hakea was instantly accepted and embraced by Carl's extended family and the Halls Creek community. Carl enjoyed sharing his hometown and bush with her- exploring the region together. Recently the couple and their son welcomed a baby girl to their family. It was on maternity leave while waiting for baby to arrive that Hakea and Carl found time to put their ideas into writing.



Five Fun Facts about the Authors

Carl Merrison

1. has always played football with the Halls Creek Hawks and coached the team in 2013-2015
2. he has a crinkled toe nail that won't grow straight from a time when his dad dropped a big rock on it
3. broke two legs in one year as a rough and tumble boy
4. was nominated for the Australian of the Year- Local Hero Award for 2016- but didn't believe it when they called and said 'nah bullshit' and hung up thinking it was a prank call!
5. has a tattoo that only he knows the meaning of- a tribute to and in joke for his father.

Hakea Hustler

1. is named after a tree- Hakea, and a mineral- Jade
2. has lived and worked as a high school teacher in Pinjarra/Mandurah WA, Geelong Victoria and Halls Creek WA
3. was raised for 10 years by her grandparents before moving back with her father at 15
4. is the oldest of four children- Jarrah owns a salon in Byron Bay, Kaisha beauty therapist/childcare worker mother of two and James is studying web design
5. has a tattoo on her foot that she packed as much meaning into as she possibly could- tattooed with her close university friends while volunteering in remote NT it means "the journey that's been and the potential to come" as well as being the Aboriginal symbol for water hole.

Sample Author Q&A

Where did you get the idea for this book?

The inspiration for this book came about through talking about our combined pasts and our shared Halls Creek experiences. There is a cockatoo named Jacko at the Kimberley Hotel in Halls Creek that was injured and caged for recovery- the staff care for him but he must look out at the birds on the lawn through his wire while drunks walk by. This formed the start of our story while our experiences, worries about the issues in Halls Creek and our hopes for our young family members helped shape the characters and plot.

What traits did you share with your main character?

Our main character is an Aboriginal female- we wanted to make her find inner strength when perhaps she didn't feel strong. We wanted to make a character that our daughter could look up to- but also that the many beautiful young girls we are related to/or work with can find hope and inspiration in. Our character overcame many personal and family issues- like both of us did. Our character discovered empathy towards animals- as Hakea is passionate about. We also wanted to show the negative side of when sometimes our boys can slide into bad habits and on the wrong path- like the brother does in our story. Carl is passionate about mentoring, supporting and inspiring young Indigenous males- so our brother is lost but there is hope for him with his family and his culture.

Did any of the inspiration of your book originate in your real life experiences?

A lot of the inspiration in the book came from some aspect of our lives or experiences. Carl brought the culture, bush life experience while Hakea could empathise with the issues in the broken home and the animal rights/human rights spin.

How do you find the time to write?

We found the time to brainstorm a lot of ideas for books and then write some while we were awaiting the birth of our daughter. It was a nice way to spend time as a family and share stories of our past that might help shape our characters.

Do you have any other projects in the works?

We are in the final editing and illustration stage for a series of short stories about some 'camp dogs' and their adventures. We are also playing with a story idea around the junk yard in Halls Creek. And we have some future plans to write about the adventures of our children. Plus lots of brainstormed but undeveloped stories written down.

What were you like at school?

Hakea: I was a book nerd who loved losing myself in books and computer games- I loved art, English, biology and psychology. We lived on the coast in Anglesea and Torquay in Victoria so after school I loved walking my staffy down on the dog beach, reading in the sand dunes, hanging out with family, sketching.

Carl: I was pretty much an ok student just with a few hick ups like most boys but loved sport, art and just hanging with friends after school out bush. After school we would play basketball, football, go motorbike riding or hang out with friends.

Which actors/actresses could you see playing your characters?

Hakea: There is a young man called Ian Layland in Halls Creek who is an amazing actor- he would have to be our 'brother' character. I would love to see aspiring actors given the chance if our book were ever made into a short film.

Carl: Well where I'm from there a lot of great actors I see every day at my school where I work but if there's someone famous that wants to take on a role how could you say no?

What was the hardest thing about writing your book?

Hakea: Finding the balance between sharing some of the issues but also pointing out the strengths of remote Aboriginal life. Knowing when to stop writing.

Carl: Talking about the culture and family life styles from where I grew up my whole life where people don't really understand or how we live.

What message do you want to send to the young people of Halls Creek?

Hakea: Stretch your wings, explore and learn from the world then land back amongst your family in your town and share your knowledge. The only cage you have is the one you lock yourself in- you have the power to make your life what you want it to be. You just have to find the strength to overcome your personal challenges.

Carl: If you put your mind to it you can live your dream and never let anyone tell you that you can't.

What advice would you give your younger self?

Hakea: This too shall pass- your struggles will just make you stronger.

Carl: Never dream to small, you can do anything.

Book Synopsis

'Black Cockatoo' follows challenges Mia's Aboriginal family face and explores the fragile connection to traditional culture.

Mia is a 13 year old Jaru girl from a remote community in the Kimberley. She grieves for the loss of her brother as he distances himself more and more from the family.

With their culture, traditions and dreaming at risk of being lost, Mia's grandfather worries what will become of his People, but is determined to keep the connection strong and remind his lost grandson that the way to adulthood is through a connection to the land and its people.

As for Mia, she is confused and feels powerless to change the things she sees around her...that is until she rescues her juddan totem animal, the dirran black cockatoo, and discovers her own inner strength.

By rescuing the bird, Mia saves herself, finding new inner strength through the bond with her juddan totem animal, her culture and tradition. 'Black Cocatoo' is a story of the power of Dreaming and the importance of culture and is indicative of issues in remote Indigenous communities.

Sample Snippet of the Book

The chorus of the yidiyidi cicadas hummed as the family set up the cooking fire in the backyard. Mia's mother threw the fresh beef on the hot plate, her grandfather handed her brother the tiny dead bird. The boy put it next to the meat cooking on the fire.

As they settled down around the fire Mia's grandfather sat close and began telling a story in a hypnotising hushed tone....

Sample Review

"An inspirational novel for all Aboriginal teens."

"A unique insight into everyday life, the struggles and the pathway to hope. A must read."

"Pure Aussie YA fiction. Get your hands on it!"

"Challenges, hope, culture. This book weaves a beautiful must-read tale of Aboriginal life."

Press Release

Mia is a 13 year old Aboriginal girl who is growing up in a remote community. When she rescues an injured cockatoo from her brother she begins a journey of self-realisation.

Australian of the Year Local Hero State Finalist Carl Merrison and cowriter Hakea Hustler penned this eye-opening story about life for teenagers in remote communities, launched in 2018 by Magabala Books.

A must read for young adults and adults alike who would like an insight into Aboriginal culture and life in a remote Aboriginal town. Open your eyes and hearts to the characters in the book and then maybe you will get a fresh view on Aboriginal Australia in your own life.

Hakea enjoyed writing since high school and went on to become an English teacher. With 10 years teaching experience she has always been eagerly involved in running speech and debating teams and writing workshops. Two students she mentored won the Tomorrow Girl Writing Competition in 2013 and 2014.

Carl loved telling bedtime stories to his son, Deklan. Having worked as an Education Assistant and a Clontarf Officer, Carl has over 10 years experience working along side students in schools- often supporting with their story writing and development. He has been actively involved in supporting young people in pursuing their dreams including coaching 2016 draft picks Sam Petrevski-Seton and Cedric Cox. These experiences and his personal life journey formed the basis for his writing in the book.

“It was so exciting to be able to share some of the experiences we have had living in a remote Aboriginal community,” commented Hakea about writing the book. “It was really special to be able to just have the time to yarn about our past stories and experiences with Carl as we co-wrote the book and awaited the birth of our daughter.”

Books can be purchased from Magabala Books online, NewSouth Books and all good major book stores. For more information visit our website hakeahustler.com.au or magabalabooks.com.au.