

Story Notes for The Whale Story told by Nelson Varcoe

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Title Slide

- 1 A long time ago there was a family living near the deepest part of the River Torrens. This was the Kondilli family.
- 2 One year there was a big drought.
- 3 This was followed by two more years of severe drought.
- 4 By this time, the only water left in the River Torrens was in the deepest part where the Kondilli family lived. Therefore, despite the drought, the Kondilli family had plenty of water to drink and plenty to eat because all the animals came there to drink.
- 5 In Aboriginal Law, the water was supposed to be there for everyone, but the Kondilli family wouldn't share it with other people of the tribe.
- 6 This made all the other people very upset, so they got together and had a big meeting where they decided to remove the Kondilli family by force.
- 7 So they armed themselves with spears, boomerangs and nulla nullas and set off.
- 8 Somehow the Kondilli family found out about the people coming to drive them out but they still didn't want to share the water. Rather than just leave the water for others, they all drank and drank until all the men, women and children had bellies so blown up with water that they could hardly walk.
- 9 Then they slowly made their way to Henley Beach.
- 10 The other members of the tribe followed the bloated Kondilli family and surrounded them on the beach.
- 11 There was nowhere for them to go so they went into the sea; they swam into deeper and deeper water to get away. Then they swam around, diving, splashing and blowing water into the air, teasing the other members of the tribe that they had got all the water and the others had none.
- 12 Back at the beach, the other members of the tribe had a corroboree and put a curse on the Kondilli family: they could never step foot on Kurna country again but had to stay in the sea.
- 13 Now you can see descendants of the Kondilli family around Victor Harbour, near the Bluff, where they breach and splash and put on a spectacle. They think they are still teasing the other Kurna people about taking all the fresh water. But Kurna people know better.
- 14 Non-Aboriginal people call them whales. But they are really descendants of the Kondilli family who were banished to the salt water because they broke Aboriginal Laws about sharing; they wouldn't share the fresh water of the River Torrens with other Kurna people.
- 15 People don't always want to listen to the truth and Jesus knew that, so Jesus told stories or parables, which have underlying truths in them.

People are more likely to listen to stories and give them more thought. And Aboriginal people are story-tellers and they tell their stories about the Dreamtime.

Many years ago, my Grandmother told me this whale story as she prepared me for sleep.

This story gives us a strong sense of sharing and this is a strong glue that helps the Aboriginal community to be united, a sense of oneness.

Psalm 8 says: “You have put us in charge of your handiwork, placing all under our stewardship.”

This means we have a responsibility to look after all parts of God’s creation – the land, the water, the air, the plants, the birds and everything that lives in the sea, and whales singing in the ocean deep, and share what we have been given. The Holy Spirit is giving us this message - this story.

Pastor Nelson Varcoe – Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress

Nelson is a Ngarrindjeri-Narungga man. This story was told to him by his grandmother, Olive Rose Varcoe (nee Rankin).

Notes:

- a. There are other Kondilli stories from Ngarrindjeri and Ramindjeri sources. Kondili is the Kurna word for whale and is sometimes spelt ‘kondilli’ or ‘kondolli’.
- b. Kondili, a Ramindjeri/Kurna story, set near Victor Harbor, South Australia, as told by Cherylynne Catanzariti, with permission from Veronica Brodie, can be found by doing a search for ‘Kondili’. This Kondili story is different and is not set in Kurna country as *The Whale Story* is.

- c. Other Kurna words -

River Torrens Karrawirra Parri

Pronunciation Tips: Stress the 1st, 3rd and 5th syllables.

The 'rr' in karra and wirra are rolled as in Indonesian or Italian, but the last 'rr' in parri is pronounced as in English. Pronounce the 'a' like the 'u' in 'but'.

see Kurna Place Names <http://www.kurnaplacenames.com>

- d. Nelson says the story also indicates why you don’t see whales off Henley Beach or in the gulf but have to go to Victor Harbour.

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