

The Three Spears

A Narrunga story told by Nelson Varcoe

1. A long time ago there were two brothers, about twelve or thirteen, who went out with their uncle to learn the ways of men and leave behind the ways of their childhood. Their uncle took them to the bush and showed them three spears: one for hunting kangaroos, one for fishing and a special one they could not touch until they became men.
2. The next day the uncle took the boys into the bush and showed them how to track different animals. Then he took them to the 'spear bush' which is really a vine with long bent branches. He showed the boys how to straighten the branches into long straight spear shafts using fire. Then he showed them how to chew kangaroo tail sinew and use this to join the barb on the spear shaft. He also taught them to walk into the wind so the kangaroo couldn't smell them and how to use hand signals so they didn't make a noise. Only one of the boys paid close attention to what he was being taught.
3. The next day the uncle took the boys into the bush to hunt kangaroos. One brother had listened to everything his uncle had told him. As a result his spear was straight and well balanced, and he was able to track a kangaroo, sneak up on him and spear him. The other boy couldn't even get close to a kangaroo, the *nantha*.
4. The successful brother was praised when they got back to camp and had a good night's sleep but the other boy felt shame and got jealous of his brother. As a result he didn't sleep very well.
5. The next day their uncle taught the two boys how to make fishing spears. He also taught them about the habits of the *kyinburra*, a big fish that came into the shallows to feed on the weeds, and about the dangerous grey stingray that hides in the sand. Again only one brother paid attention to what he was being taught. When the boys were sent to try to spear a *kyinburra*, only the brother who had listened carefully to his uncle was able to spear a *kyinburra* and take it back to camp.
6. The other brother was filled with anger, jealousy and shame, and unable to sleep. Instead he made a plan. He got up very, very early and took the special spear the boys had been told not to touch and headed into the bush to spear a kangaroo. But he hadn't learned the skills so was not successful.
7. Then he headed down to the beach to try to spear a *kyinburra*. There were plenty there but, again, he hadn't learned the skills, so he started spearing stingrays, which doesn't take any skill.

8. By that time the first brother had woken up and followed his brother to the beach. He pleaded with his brother to put the special spear back but he wouldn't. Instead, the disobedient brother speared his brother. He got rid of his brother's body, cleaned the spear and rushed back to camp to return the special spear.
9. When his uncle asked him where his brother was, the disobedient brother lied to his uncle and told him he didn't know. He did this three times.
10. His uncle knew something was wrong so he followed the boys' tracks. He saw two sets of footprints leading to the water but only one set coming out.
11. He knew something bad had happened so he went back to the camp and told the old people. They started a big corroboree and put a curse on the disobedient brother.
12. Meanwhile, the disobedient brother had gone back to the beach with the special spear and was killing stingrays. He could hear the chants of the old people, and the sounds of the clap sticks. Then he felt his body changing. Gradually his body turned grey and flattened out, but he still held onto the special barbed spear. He was turned into a *gathera*, a little grey stingray that hides under the sand with only a barbed tail sticking up to catch its prey.
13. Of all the senses that we have, Aboriginal people believe that hearing is the one we should master first because we have that even when we are in our mother's womb. In order to hear properly, we need to learn to pay attention and listen. Then we need to follow instructions and not tell lies about things that happen.

Relationships and community are very important to Aboriginal people. Anything that breaks those relations damages the community. So this story is also a warning about jealousy and thinking only about yourself.

In Romans 8 verse 13, Paul writes: If we only live for ourselves we will soon come to a dead end. But if the Spirit leads us we will learn who we really are, where we belong and how we are to live.

About the author

Uncle Nelson Varcoe is a Ngarrindjeri / Narrunga man. His grandmother was a Ngarrindjeri woman sent to live at Point Pearce on York Peninsula in Narrunga country and his father was a Narrunga man. As well as being a story-teller, Uncle Nelson is a singer / song-writer and artist. He is a Pastor with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) congregation based at Salisbury North.