

**The Gum Tree Couple** – an Adnyamathanha Story  
*Told by Aunty Denise Champion*

In ancient times our ancestors spoke these words. They told the story of the Gum Tree Couple – how strong and tall they stood together. In a time long ago they stood together, husband and wife, the Gum Tree Couple. Around the Gum Tree Couple, lots of young gum tree saplings grew. They grew well, tall and strong. Then one day some strange people came and cut a road where the Gum Tree Couple stood. It was their home. It was a very deep sadness. They broke the couple's connection with country, and with each other. They dug up the earth where the Gum Tree Couple had stood. It is a very deep sadness, as they stood alone, a very deep sadness.

***What can we learn from this story on Reconciliation Sunday?***

John 17:11 "...so that they may be one, as we are one."

Like all Dreaming Stories, the *Gum Tree Couple* can teach us about:

1. Our relationships with one another
2. Our relationship to our environment (because every story relates to a specific place)
3. Our relationship with the spiritual word, in particular our Creator.

Aunty Denise often uses this story when talking with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about reconciliation because it enables her to talk about the hurts suffered by Aboriginal people in a non-threatening way. These hurts, or the interruption in the way Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have related to each other, are symbolised by the cutting of the road through where the trees stood. This disconnection was forced on Aboriginal people by the churches when Aboriginal people were told they had to leave their language and culture behind if they wanted to accept the support of the church. As a result, many Aboriginal people still hold a lot of anger towards the church. Through stories like this one Aunty Denise believes she can help her people grieve and start on the road to healing.

For her, this story is very symbolic of relationships and the boundaries of relationships. When two people (or groups of people) have healthy relationships there are positive outcomes. In the story this is symbolised by both the existence of the saplings and their health. These offspring also provide an opportunity for younger generations to move forward in positive ways.

Also, for Aunty Denise, this story teaches us the importance of the spiritual realm to our lives. Although God is not mentioned, the very existence of the *Gum Tree Couple* implies there is a Creator. Different stories tell of different aspects of the nature of the Creator and all Aboriginal people have/had names for the Creator. This spirituality is very important because it is about how a group of people understand who they are in much the way that the Israelites found themselves and God through their journeys. When Aunty Denise introduces herself she always uses Adnyamathanha. For her, it's about the freedom to be who she really is. It also helps those who do not understand the language to understand how Aboriginal people felt when they couldn't understand English but were not allowed to use their own languages.

Through this story, which Aunty Denise tells in both Adnyamathanha and English, people are hearing Adnyamathanha names for God, often for the first time, and are being reminded that Aboriginal people have always known God, the Creator Spirit.

The following questions could be used to start a conversation around the story and tease out its meanings for each one of us:

- A. What could the trees symbolise?
- B. What could the road symbolise?
- C. Where might the road lead?
- D. What is its purpose and is it a help or a hindrance to relationships?
- E. How could we use that road in a positive way so that we might build new relationships?