

Alice Bilari Smith was born at Rocklea Station in the Pilbara in 1923*, her mother being a Banyjima woman and her father a white teamster. She was raised by her Aboriginal family and, although she did not know it at the time, narrowly escaped being removed to Moore River. After marriage to Bulluru Jack Smith, Alice spent most of her adult years living in the bush and raising a large family. They retained their language and many of their customs, and it was not until 1969 that Alice settled in Roebourne so that her children could attend school. Living in Roebourne, she was a foster mother to fifteen children and a valued member of the community. Alice died on 1 February 2012 at Roebourne District Hospital.

Anna Vitenbergs was born in Scotland and came to live in the Pilbara where her father was wharfinger in the 1960s. For some years while her husband Robert was in the Royal Australian Navy they lived abroad or interstate, but were pleased to return to Point Samson with their family in the 1980s. They relocated to Denmark in the south of the state in 2012. Anna recorded the story and songs of Pilbara woman Lola Young in the book *Lola Young: medicine woman and teacher*, published in 2007 by Fremantle Press.

Loreen Brehaut is a New Zealander who lived in Western Australia for eight years while her husband Bill was working for Woodside Energy Ltd. While there she became active recording oral histories and was co-author of Florence Corrigan's autobiography, *Miles of Post and Wire*, which was shortlisted for the 1999 WA Premier's Book Awards.

Together Anna and Loreen collected the oral histories which developed into *The Kurrama Story*, and then recorded a major series of interviews about life in the Pilbara in pre-industrial days. This became the basis for the book *Pilbara Journey Through the Twentieth Century*.

* Here and throughout, words marked with an asterisk appear in Notes and Corrections on pages 234–35.

ALICE BILARI SMITH

WITH ANNA VITENBERGS

AND LOREEN BREHAUT

**UNDER
A BILARI
TREE
I BORN**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are respectfully advised that deceased people are referenced in this publication.



FREMANTLE PRESS

*For
my sons and daughters,
grandchildren, great-grandchildren
and cousin family*



Alice Bilari Smith.

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AUTHORS' NOTE

This book was a true three-way collaboration. Alice had met Anna and Loreen in conjunction with their recording of Aboriginal oral histories and asked them to work on her story. After several other projects were completed by Anna and Loreen, the work began, assisted by a grant celebrating the centenary of women's suffrage from the Government of Western Australia. Alice and Anna met regularly and twelve tapes of oral history were recorded. These were transcribed by Loreen and organised into a draft manuscript. Chapter by chapter, Loreen read this version back to Alice for her comments and approval. Changes, additions and deletions were made according to Alice's wishes, and all three were satisfied with the result. The project took over two years to complete and, despite the difficulties presented by the fact that Alice lived in Roebourne, Anna in Point Samson and Loreen in Perth, they were proud of their joint effort and all enjoyed the experience of working together and becoming good friends.



A bilari tree (Acacia atkinsiana).

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BIRTH AND FAMILY: COUNTRY AND STATION

Under a bilari tree I born, on Rocklea Station

I am Alice Smith, but my real name Bilari, because under a *bilari* tree I born, on Rocklea Station. I never had whitefella name, they used to call me Aborigine name: Bilari. Sometimes they say Bidayi; it's easier. Walter Smith wrote it down in his station book; the whitefellas used to have a record when we born. A few years ago we went to the museum in Perth, to see all the old papers, and when my daughter follow them history way back, from Rocklea Station, my name is there: Bilari, and I born 1928*.

We used to get fruit from that bilari tree, when they in season. He still standing too, that tree, but you can see we've been chopping it. He *big*, now! It's in Sandy Creek on Rocklea Station. Not only me — lots and lots of kids been born in that little gully.

My mother was a full-blood Aborigine; Banyjima