

## **How the Murray River got its Name.**

### **Chosen culture - Australian Indigenous Culture**

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This Dreamtime story has been passed down from generation to generation, father to son, mother to daughter. You can't find it in a book because the Aboriginal people always told their stories orally.

In the Dreamtime, the Goodwarra people lived in the driest place on Earth. It was a vast plain of red sand. An arid, barren desert. There was no permanent water source. The temperature would change so much from night to day. During the day, it was a scorching heat that would set the sand on fire, and then at night it would plummet down to freezing. In the dawn, this created a blanket of white, misty fog that covered everything; rocks, little twigs and the scarce vegetation with tiny, life giving droplets of water.

The Goodwarra people set up their camp near the only desert tree that could be seen for miles. They called this tree, 'The tree of life'. This was a valuable tree because it provided the people with shade from the scorching sun. The tree also provided the people with food like little grubs and animals that would nest in the tree. It also provided them with medicines and firewood.

Even though the people cherished 'The tree of life', above all, their most precious item was water. They told stories about vast flowing rivers to the South and emerald green oceans to the East. They danced the water dance and painted symbols representing water on their bodies with ochre.

Every day, the Goodwarra women had to find water, for without water there is no life. The women would set off at dawn before the searing sun emerged. They would take their little babies or children with them. This was for two reasons, one, the women were teaching their children the vital skill of finding water and two, some of the children were too young to be left with the men. The women would look for the scarce vegetation that grew scattered on the land, for they knew they would find precious water there. Then, with their digging sticks they would dig near the base of the plants where the roots were. Slowly a little well would emerge, filling up with water. The women would then scoop out the water with the big nut shells from 'The tree of life' and store the water in their water bags.

There was a woman called Warey, she was the wife of Gurrumarra, he was the most important hunter of the tribe. Warey had special water finding skills, and was respected by everyone from all over the land. People from other arid regions would walk for days just so they could ask her where they could find water near their camp. Gurrumarra and Warey had

a little boy, his name was Murray. She would take him everywhere with her, for he was her only son and she loved him dearly.

On this particular day, Warey set off at dawn with Murray to find water for the camp. She came upon a scraggly little plant and knew there would be water under it. She took out her digging stick and started to dig while keeping a sharp eye on Murray as he played nearby. Warey was so intent on her job, she did not notice Murray chasing a little frilled neck lizard, taking him away from his mother. Murray followed the little lizard behind some large boulders, and into a small crevice, where he was safe and happy playing with the lizard....

When Warey looked up, she could not see Murray. She began to panic. Murray was only little and the searing sun could suck the water out of his body very quickly if she did not find him soon. He was her precious one, her life. She began to look around her, wild with fear and panic. She ran this way, she ran that way, all the while calling out his name. Murray, Murray, Murraaay.

She begin sobbing, frightened and exhausted, she sat on the red, dusty earth and sobbed and sobbed, her tears rolling down her face and into the dry parched earth. She did not notice that a tiny pool of water was gathering around her, the harder she cried, the faster the water gathered, first into a small puddle, then a bubbling brook, then a fast flowing river. Before Warey realised what was happening, she was being carried away by the water. Over the hills of barren land she went until hitting the boulders where Murray lay sound asleep. The water had led her to her beloved son.

She had cried a river of tears.

That is how the Murray River got its name.