

Author with Books goes West to The Kimberley

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At 4:30 am, with my backpack on my shoulders, I was heading to the remotest part of The Kimberley, to share my books and passion for literacy with indigenous communities.

But first the intensive and extensive checks. Everyone was relieved that I passed the criminal tests, got my working-with-children clearance, just scraped through my medical, had a passport which said I was older than 16 (much older), with my real photo on it. I was reassured that if a tiger snake bit me or I fell into a crocodile infested creek or was attacked by a dingo, that the Royal Flying Doctors would come for me, even in the most isolated far-flung spot.

Flying into Broome, I saw the stunning coastline of blue seas and sandy beaches. My first stop was a camel ride at sunset, bouncing along Cable Beach. That's when I met Ralph. He had a huge nose with many hairs sticking out of it, but after I patted him, we bonded and he nibbled my shirt. This trip was looking good, even though I hadn't done anything yet.

Then I met the female version of Indiana Jones. Kim wore those khaki shorts and shirt, with rough socks popping out over her boots and a slouch hat. She was Project Manager for World Vision Australia, driving the huge four-wheel drive and pulling a storage trailer for camping gear, water, and supplies. We were heading inland with a team of wonderful 'true believers' from World Vision Australia, who are committed to empowering indigenous people to lead their own development, to create life in all its fullness for Australian indigenous children. I was on this trip as a children's author to witness the impact of the My Mob

playgroups, promote literacy and to tell story.

As you drive on the dirt roads, eleven hours deep into country, there are no hotels, one outback petrol station, a couple of roadhouses run by community and stunning landscapes of bulbous boab trees, stretches of termite mounds, huge

mountain ranges, dusty

landscapes, bush, gorges, waterholes and rivers filled with crocodiles.

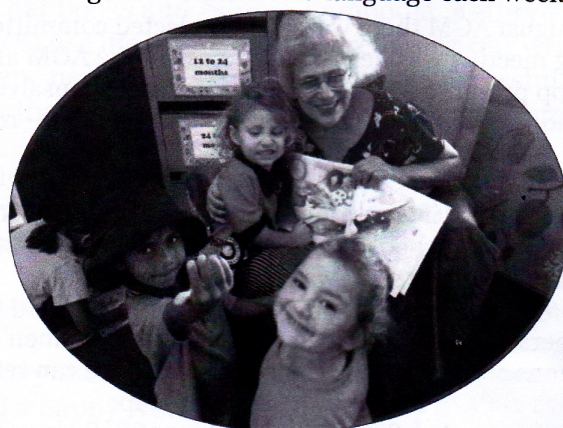
It was special to be invited by traditional elders into their remote communities, which are not open to tourists and visitors. It is slow time there, where the women measured me up. I was accepted as I joined the My Mob playgroups, where mothers and children interacted with books and pre-reading skill activities in preparation for school. The women were being taught to lead these playgroups, so that World Vision Australia would eventually leave the indigenous

women to run the play groups independently.

One of the great highlights was my visit to the Wananami Remote Community School inside a very distant community.

It's a beautiful school, with its small, struggling vegetable garden and splash of green lawn, in a red and dry landscape. The young teachers are incredibly dedicated, and their classrooms decorated with the children's art. The impressive traditional

owner Deb Donation is committed to engendering pride in the children's indigenous culture and teaches indigenous culture and language each week.



As I read to the infants' children my picture book *Elephants Have Wings*, they became more and more engaged, moving closer and closer to me, until they were nearly inside the book. I was moved when they related their *Dreamtime* stories to *Elephants Have Wings*.