

The people of Lake Namun

A story of community by Annie Bryant

Once, a long, long time ago or was it just a moment gone? In a land far far away yet only round the bend....there lived a small community of men, women and children.

Some were mothers and fathers to their daughters and sons, some were grandmothers and grandfathers to their granddaughters and grandsons, and some came as elders, not necessarily old, but with much wisdom to share with them all.

Each of the men, women and children had traveled from far away lands, leaving behind all they had known, in search of a place where they could drink the clean water, live beside the tall trees and breathe in the fresh mountain air.

And it was in this place that they had found it.

Lake Namun was a beautiful and pristine body of water that had called each of the travellers to her shores, leading them to her and to each other.

The first time they walked around the banks of Lake Namun they saw the water sparkling like diamonds, bursting full with birds, frogs, insects and all kinds of wildlife, and they immediately knew this was their place.

Together they started dreaming of a new life they could make for themselves and their children on the banks of this wondrous lake.

The great paperbark tree that stood proud and tall beside the lake, each morning invited the people to gather under its huge protective arms that reached out over Lake Numun, and one by one, they would walk slowly in a giant circle all the way around the great lake. With every step they would continue their dreaming while they sang their gratitude for this special place in the world.

Bundjulung Joo-gun boogoobere ja-lee ga-wun

(In Bundjulung country there is a beautiful tree beside a lagoon)

Can anyone guess just how many steps it took to walk all the way around that lake? Let's say 564 exactly, so when they had finished walking all those steps, dreaming and singing with ever step of the way, the children would sit beneath the majestic and protective limbs of the old paperbark tree called JA-LEE and play games and hear stories from the elders learning all kinds of wonderful things about the world while the parents set to work building all of those dreams into real life houses and sheds and playgrounds and beautiful gardens filled with food and plants.

And so the people of Lake Namun walked and dreamed and sang every morning, and worked hard through the day and danced in the evening and their community prospered with so much happiness and purpose that soon more and more people heard of them and their special place, and they too traveled from near and far to join them.

The new arrivals gathered with the others each morning under JA-LEE the paperbark tree and they each walked those 564 steps of dreaming and singing around the lake whereafter their children and elders went to the newly finished shelters to continue their lessons while the parents worked even harder building and expanding to make enough room for everyone.

Soon there were so many new families meeting each morning under the big old JA-LEE that the path around the lake was becoming crowded.

And what with so many more children to teach and so many more new houses to build, the morning walk soon became more of a run to get to the busy day ahead, and this didn't leave much room at all for dreaming or singing.

And so it wasn't long before the people, so busy with their new lives and new purpose, stopped walking around the lake at all.

And that was how the people of Lake Namun came to forget about that beautiful nourishing lake and the big old JA-LEE standing guard by its shores.

There was no more walking. There was no more dreaming. And there was no more singing.

Yet the community continued to grow bigger and bigger, and while some families grew up and moved on in search of quieter places, new families with young children quickly replaced them, happy to find the fabled people of Lake Namun.....although they did wonder every now and then just what the Lake Namun part meant because as far as they could see there wasn't a lake here at all.

And that was how the people finally noticed that Lake Namun and big old JA-LEE had almost disappeared.

When the people realized that Lake Namun had all but dried up they turned to each other and asked why & how?

Some said it was drought. Some said the soil was no good anymore. And some said that maybe it was just nature's way.

Those who could remember the stories of the beautiful Lake Namun that once was felt sad to see the hard thirsty soil and the barren ground that now lay before them.

But as it always surely does, life quickly went on and it wasn't long before almost everyone completely forgot that Lake Namun and JALEE the big old paperbark tree had ever even existed.

Almost everyone I said, except of course, for the children.

Fascinated by the stories of this once great lake protected by an old paperbark tree the children began to explore the dried up lakebed and were delighted to find a big old dead trunk laid fallen to the earth just beside it.

There was something special about this place that they had somehow never found before, and even if it was just a great dustbowl, it still made a great spot to play.

Especially that huge fallen tree.

Some days it was giant ship sailing on the clear blue waters.

Some days it made a magnificent bridge paving the way between lost worlds.

And every day the children would scramble all over it exploring each and every branch and marking until the day they found the ancient symbol.

It was carved deep into the skin of the tree and looked like it had been there for a thousand years or so.

The symbol was of a spiral shape and one by one the children carefully traced their fingers around it until they were able to grab a stick each and make their own spirals in the hard dirt floor of the lakebed.

Their spirals grew bigger and bigger – until their drawings got so big that they took up the entire lakebed itself, appearing like a huge labyrinth covering the landscape.

And that's how they got the idea to walk it.

Every day, one by one, they took turns walking the spiral they had drawn together just like the one on the tree – and each time they noticed something new and interesting about this long forgotten lake.

They imagined what it once looked and felt like when it was full to the brim with sparkling water and frogs and birds and insects of every kind.

And with all that dreaming something started to grow inside of them.

Every day they walked and dreamed and after a while, they even started to sing as they spiraled around the lakebed.

Bundjulung Joo-gun boogoobere ja-lee ga-wun

(In Bundjulung country there is a beautiful tree beside a lagoon)

Every morning they continued to walk and dream and sing while in the daytime they set to work on those dreams and they slowly planted the beginnings of a lush green landscape filled with young paperbark seedlings and the hope that one day the water might return.

It was a big job and took a lot of hard work, but each morning when they walked and dreamed and sang it seemed to help their hands to work harder and faster and before long all the people of the community noticed the activity.

They too started walking and dreaming and singing as they spiraled the still dry Lake Namun in the morning, and worked hard alongside the children each day to restore the landscape which was quickly becoming more and more green and lush.

Together the people of Lake Namun each morning filled that empty lakebed with their dreaming and singing, and it was quite a sight and sound to behold.

Bundjulung Joo-gun boogoobere ja-lee ga-wun

(In Bundjulung country there is a beautiful tree beside a lagoon)

And so on and on they continued to walk and dream and sing and work hard together, until one fine Spring day, when the buzz of bees feeding on the blossoms of the now young and strong paperbark trees filled the air, a tiny stream of water popped out from the bottom of Lake Namun, filling the earth and the people's hearts with joy.