



## Gifts of the Peramangk

Dean Mayes

*In 1950s Australia, during the height of the divisive White Australia Policy, Virginia, a young Aboriginal girl is taken from her home and put to work on an isolated and harsh outback station. Her only solace: the violin, taught to her secretly by the kind-hearted wife of the abusive station owner. However, Virginia's prodigious musical gift cannot save her from years of hardship and racism.*

*Decades later, her eight year old granddaughter Ruby, plays the violin with the passion Virginia once possessed. Amidst poverty, domestic violence and social dysfunction, Ruby escapes her circumstance through her practice with her grandmother's frail, guiding hand. Ruby's zeal attracts the attention of an enigmatic music professor and with his help, she embarks on an incredible journey of musical discovery that will culminate in a rare opportunity. But with two cultural worlds colliding, her gift and her ambition will be threatened by deeply ingrained distrust, family jealousies and tragic secrets that will define her very identity.*

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"It has been a long time since I read a book that made me think about life and about serious issues instead of just escaping into a good story. (It was a good story too.) And a longer time still since a book made me cry because it was so wonderfully written and contained such a powerful, moving story." ~ Once Upon A Dream Books

"Dean writes so beautifully, that you can hear the music playing. You feel the emotions that are poured into compositions from the artists. I felt like I was back in orchestra, listening to a playback of a performance."  
~ Books Complete Me

### Discussion Questions

1. What are the parallels between the first nation peoples depicted in the story Gifts of the Peramangk and first nation peoples in your country?
2. How influential do you think Ruby's gift was on those around her? Was it a positive influence or a negative one?
3. How much of an impact do the events of the past have on the present? For example – Virginia's childhood experience. Ruby's mother's experience?
4. The Peramangk culture of Ruby and Virginia's ancestors are a "character" in the story. What characteristics of the Peramangk Aborigines influence the story? The characters of Virginia, Ruby and Jeremy?

Australian author **Dean Mayes** has established himself as a writer of great literary style and dedication since the release of his first novel *The Hambledown Dream* in 2010. He continues that tradition with his landmark new release *Gifts of the Peramangk* for Central Avenue Publishing.

A Paediatric Registered Nurse with over 15 years experience in Intensive Care, Emergency and Haematology Nursing, Dean lives in Adelaide, Australia with his wife Emily and their two children, Xavier and Lucy.



### Interview with Dean Mayes

Q. How did you come up with the idea for “Gifts of the Peramangk”?

A. Gifts of the Peramangk started out as my wanting to write a story about a child prodigy and how her 'gift' affects those around that child. As the idea evolved, I chose to make the child an Aborigine – which was met with some scepticism from most of my friends and family, given that I am not an Aboriginal Australian. But from within that idea grew the desire to understand the rather tragic history of Aboriginal Australia – particularly the modern history, during the early 20th century, up to now. The White Australia Policies of past Australian Governments had a profound effect on Aboriginal Australia and I wanted to understand that.

Q. How much research was involved in writing your book? How did you go about it?

A. There was a huge research curve involved in Gifts of the Peramangk because I was setting it against the back drop of one of Australia’s most controversial periods in the 20th century. The White Australia Policy was instituted as a means of addressing the “problem” of half caste Aborigines in Australia over the life of the Policy, many thousands of children were forcibly removed from their families and fostered out to white families or were put to work as domestic servants or farm hands, doing menial jobs for little to no pay. They were prohibited from returning to or having contact with their families. The resultant Stolen Generations was the result of this policy – Aboriginal Australians who had their identity and culture stripped away from them. It led to massive social problems which still resonate today. In order to portray the effects of the White Australia Policy on one particular family with a sensitivity and accuracy, I devoted nearly a year to reviewing literature, examining case studies, talking to individuals who were directly affected by the Policy.

Q. Were you “born to write” or did you discover your passion for writing later in life?

A. I realised I had a love of writing from an early age but I guess you could consider me somewhat of a late bloomer as a serious author. For me it was a case of my life getting in the way – school, university, work, family commitments and so forth. And these aren’t bad things of course (laughs) but they certainly gave me little time to devote to writing. Also, I don’t think I was really in the right head space to write until my mid 30’s. I had a couple of failed attempts at it before then but for whatever reason, I couldn’t make the stories work. When the idea for (my first novel) *The Hambledown Dream* germinated, it seemed to be the right fit at the right time.

Q. What books or authors have most influenced your writing?

A. That's a difficult one to answer because when I began writing seriously, I don't think I based my style on anyone in particular. I found my own style and kinda ran with it. My style is individual and so I guess I gravitate towards authors who are similarly individual in their style. Beryl Bainbridge (*Every Man For Himself*) certainly comes to mind. Simon Winchester (*The Surgeon Of Crowethorne*) is an author I return to time and time again. Even though he writes non fiction, his style is very much the lyrical and I find I synchronise with it really well on a reading level. Molly Ringle (*The Ghost Downstairs, What Scotland Taught Me*) is an author who writes with great enthusiasm and affection for her characters and her subject and I have to admit to holding a candle for her as the kind of author I want to be.

Q. Do you hear much from readers? If so, what do they say?

A. I do hear from my readers and I have to say it is one of the most rewarding experiences one can have as an author. I love discussing my work, receiving feedback – both good and not so good and talking about the writing journey. Sometimes, a reader will say something or offer a suggestion that actually touches off a whole slew of new ideas which is really great. It's a reciprocal relationship that inspires me to write more. I've made it a little policy of mine to send any reader who reaches out to me a signed bookmark as a keep sake. It's just a small way that I can thank them for taking a chance on my work.