



They didn't giggle. She read the entire book aloud and then rang me to offer an advance to publish it. The rego was paid. Then A and R was in a corporate takeover, and then another. Each time 'Rainstones' was re evaluated by yet another editorial team, and accepted yet again. This delay meant that even though I wrote the book more than 30 years ago, it's only been 25 years — and 3 million books — since it was published. It's been in print ever since.



Rainstones was Braidwood. The title story was written about the 1978-83 drought. Dusty's dragon is the massive goanna that lived up the gorge; the boys in Jacob Saw and their swimming lessons are in the book because I wrote the story there. The late Netta Ellis even recognised herself in Mrs Halibut — and complained her husband called her 'Fishface' for weeks.

But *Rainstones* is just one book. The Matilda series began as a trilogy, became a quartet. It was meant to be a history of our nation told from one country town, and the viewpoints of those who had no political voice in 1892, when the series begins: women, indigenous people, Chinese, Afghans. By book four I realised that history didn't stop just because I was born, and that the series will continue as long as I live. The book released this week, *If Blood Should Stain the Wattle*, is set 1972-1975, the years of a deeply idealistic Australia even if the dreams of what exactly the ideal Australia might be varied enormously — and died with the dismissal, when social and political timidity began to rule.

Gibber's Creek is not Braidwood. Not exactly. But any reader who remembers the earliest version of Torpy's might remember some similarities with Leafsong's Blue Belle café, as well as the first Café Altenburg. You might even remember the night when

Thank you Braidwood.

Jackie French tells the story of how poverty and poverty can lead to providence.

Gibber's Creek is not Braidwood. Definitely. Absolutely. And yet ...

Thirty years ago, broke, living in a shed with my young son, a wallaby, a wombat and a black snake called Gladys, I needed \$106.44 to pay for my car rego. The first two people ever to encourage me to write, a local freelance journalist and Judith Wright, poet, suggested I earn the money with words.

My typewriter came from the Majors Creek dump. I sat on the floor to type and after three months of wombat droppings on the keyboard the typewriter began to show its age — the

letter 'e' refused to work at all. The book that became *Rainstones* was thus created without the most common letter of the alphabet.

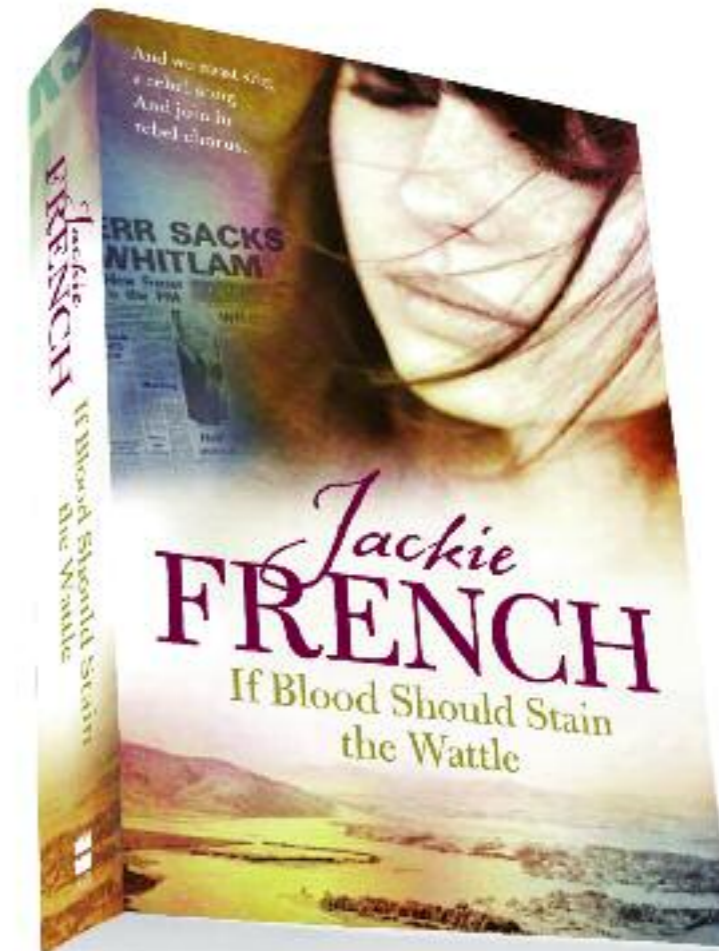
The spelling was also ... original. I'm dyslexic. I still can't spill/spall/spell. I had no idea where to send a book, so I looked up 'p for publisher' in the Sydney telephone book at the post office. The first on the list was Angus and Robertson, who eventually published *Rainstones*, but only because the editor who first picked it out of the pile gave a scream of laughter at the mess and the spelling, and began to read it to the office, for a giggle.

Nostradamus predicted that the world would end as the northern hemisphere blew up — or at least some of the more gullible read that catastrophe into his enigmatic writings.

No character in *If Blood Should Stain the Wattle* is based on any living person, apart from those like the late Tom Uren, or Rex Connor, who are beyond suing for defamation — not that they would have — but not beyond memory of their courage and integrity. Gough and Margaret Whitlam, too, of course, and Sir John Kerr, are now beyond the courts, although not gossip of conspiracies.

You won't recognise yourself in *If Blood Should Stain the Wattle*, but I hope, if you were here back then, you will remember. It was an incredible time to be young, but perhaps all times are.

And so — because I absentmindedly promised Paul an article in a week when I had four other deadlines, one for the final version of a new historical series for adults — this is a thank you to Braidwood. You have given me material for about 200 books — so far. But more than that. The Matilda series is a love song to the land and its people. The history of Braidwood mirrors that of our nation.



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