

We watched
our river
rise



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways where this story takes place.

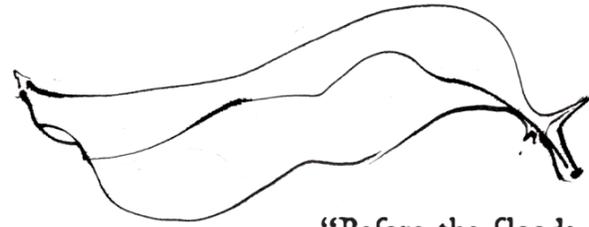
We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and to all First Nations people who have cared for this Country for tens of thousands of years.

The Maribyrnong River has flowed through this land for countless generations. It has changed its shape, its path, and its rhythms—but it has always been here.

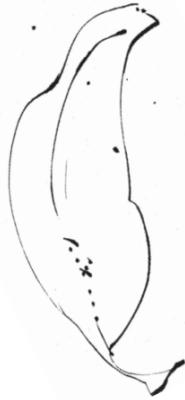
It is from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people's connection to Country, land and water that inspired this story of a baby possum as it rides on its mother's back during the event of the 2022 Maribyrnong River floods—through a story of change, resilience and strength.

BEFORE

"Before the floods, I liked playing footy on the other side of the river." — Charlie



"Before the floods, we liked going to the park as a family, but felt less connected with other local families." — Ethan

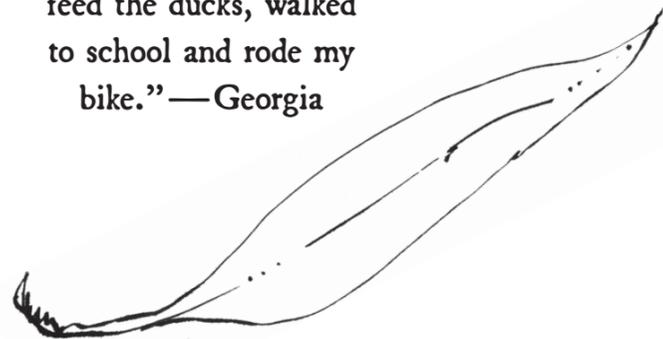


"Before the floods, when I was riding my bike, one of my training wheels fell into the river." — Jordan



"I don't remember before the floods." — Jasmine

"Before the floods, I went to the parks to feed the ducks, walked to school and rode my bike." — Georgia



"Before the floods, we were all safe, but were we really connected?" — Michelle



AFTER

"It's okay to be sad, but remember you are strong." — Georgia

"I am strong after the flood." — Charlie

"After the floods, we went to our new place." — Jasmine



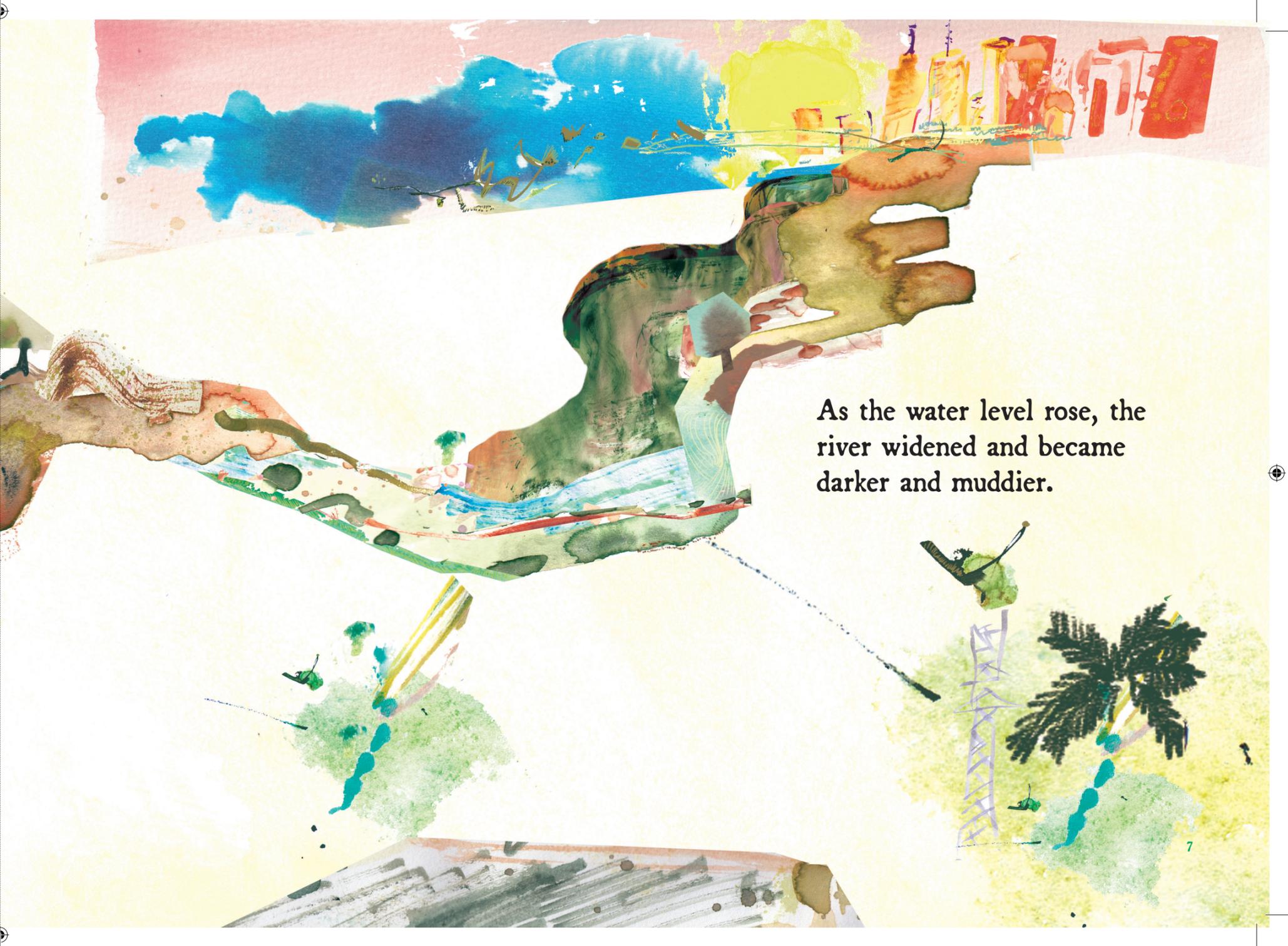
"After the floods, I went to the Floods and Me program. I drew there." — Jordan

"You have to go through hard things before it gets easier. The nutrients are left behind for nature and the community to grow." — Ethan

"The floods may have taken away our home, but it has given us a sense of community." — Michelle



One sunny day, a baby possum
and its mother were awoken by
the song of rushing water.



As the water level rose, the
river widened and became
darker and muddier.

The bushes and plants were pulled from their roots
and got swept away from their homes.



A sneaky snake got stuck in the
river. To stay safe, it wrapped itself
around a tree and held on tight.



A colony of ants latched onto one another making a living raft to stay afloat.



Lizards and skinks held onto plastic bottles and other rubbish floating in the water. They were clinging to life and hope like all the other animals.



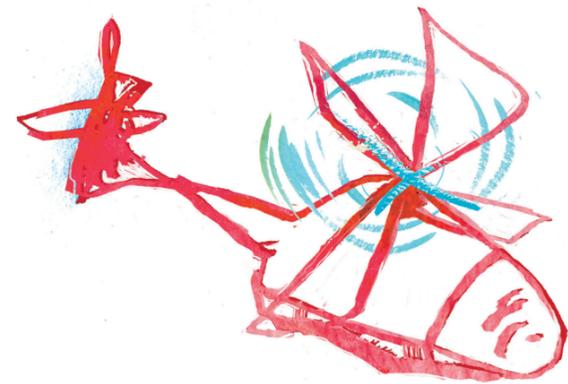


The baby possum saw ducks standing on surfboards! People had shared them to help the ducks stay safe in the current.

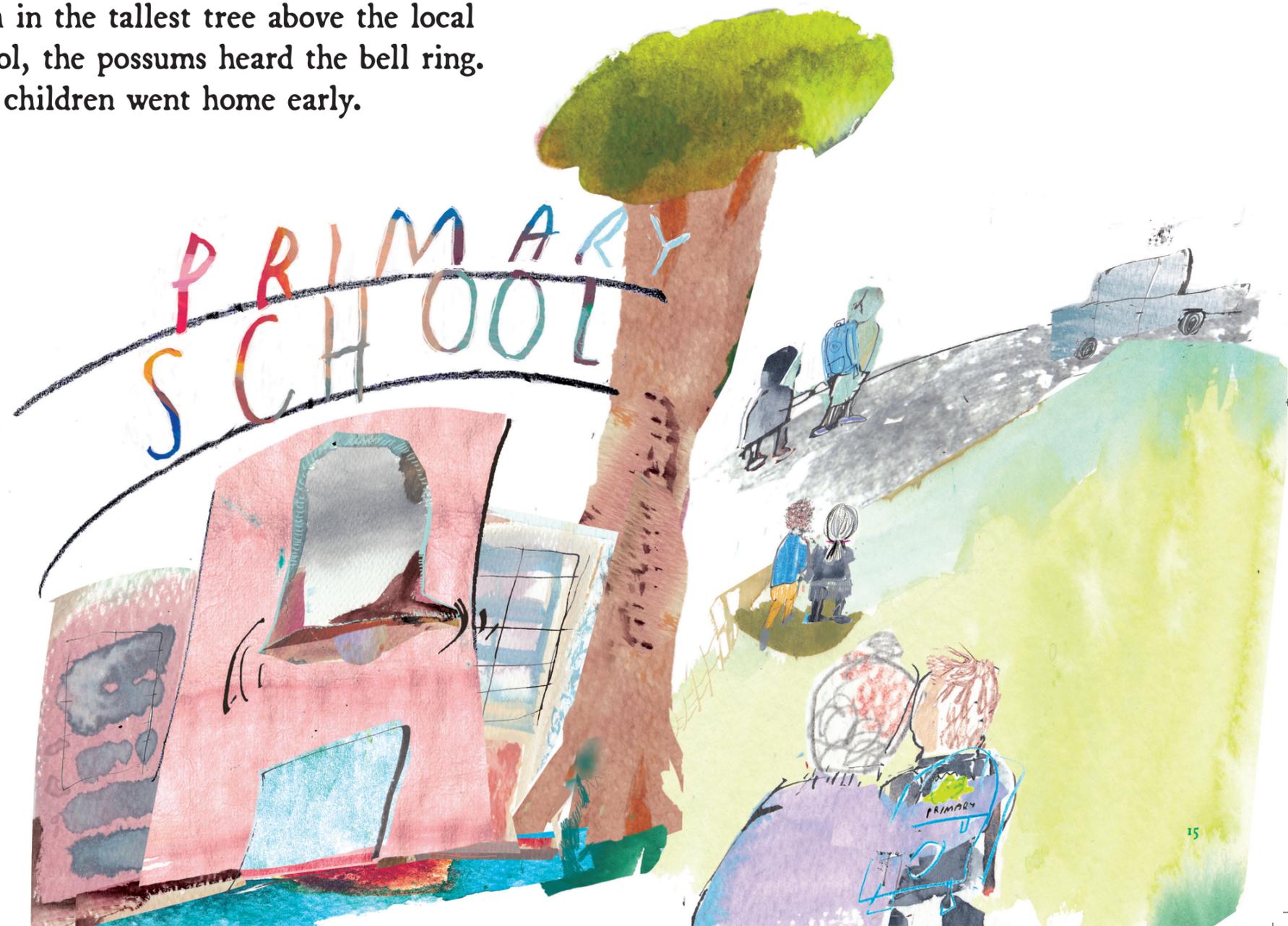
Families were stuck. The roads were flooded, and many were closed. The cars were slipping in the thick mud.

ROAD CLOSED

The baby possum saw many people wearing orange uniforms coming to the rescue in small boats. They travelled along the flooded roads to pick people up. A LOUD helicopter circled above them.



High in the tallest tree above the local school, the possums heard the bell ring. The children went home early.



The baby possum's mum led them into a family's backyard.

"Woah! I've never seen water here before," she said. Bicycles lay scattered, and toys floated in the muddy water. "I guess the kids forgot to clean up."



They watched as the family walked through the water to their car, then drove away from their house and up the hill.





The possums wandered through the house. Mud covered the floor, and the mum left pawprints behind.

The people who lived here put things up high on the kitchen benches to keep them dry, but some toys were still left on the floor, covered in mud.

As the sun began to set, the water level started to go back home, just like everyone else. The possums climbed back into a tree.

The next day, in the backyard, the family discovered the damage. "What a mess! Look at all this mud!" the boy shouted in shock. Then they saw his sister burst into tears.



They heard the boy shout
“Cool, mud! Let’s go sliding!”



Then, excitement took over.
“Look, mum! I found \$5!”
His dad chuckled,
“Look, I found a high heel shoe!”



The possum heard one of the
neighbours down the street
yell “that is my mum being
interviewed on TV!”



The possums heard more people talking to
each other. “Hello! Are you okay?”

They were using brooms to sweep the muddy
water away from the homes. Neighbours,
friends, and even strangers helped each other
clean up for a long time.



“Mum, why do they choose to live by the river?” the baby possum asked. “Because it’s their home,” its mother responded. “Now we must go back to ours.”



Standing in their damp backyard, the boy was surrounded by family and friends, new and old. One of the neighbours was cooking a barbeque after a long day of cleaning up together.

His parents were tired, he could tell, but they were still laughing with the neighbours. He grabbed his Rubik’s cube and ran off to play with the other kids.

we rise above

THE

Rising

Water

People Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the generous support, creativity, and dedication of many individuals and organisations.

We extend our thanks to the families who participated, and to the young creators who shared their ideas and imaginations. In respecting their privacy, children's surnames have been removed. We'd like to thank: Michelle, Charlie, Ethan, Jasmine, Jordan, and Georgia.

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- Lead Facilitator: Julian Gasparri.
- Facilitators: Simon Conlon, Julia Cascocueella, Kiki Havos and Lesley Pinder.
- Other contributors: Renae Okao, Jenny Tran, Ella Bucovaz, Lena Cirillo (CEO).

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- Janice Florent, Counselling Practice Excellence Coach and
- Melissa Cody, Child and Family Counsellor.

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution and support of Maribyrnong City Council in initiating and delivering this project, alongside a range of flood recovery programs for many ages and needs.

We also acknowledge the Maribyrnong Community Recovery Committee, particularly Mary Cameron, whose vision sparked this program.

Creative collaborators:

- Book Design and Layout: Regine Abos
- Illustrations: Tam Bower

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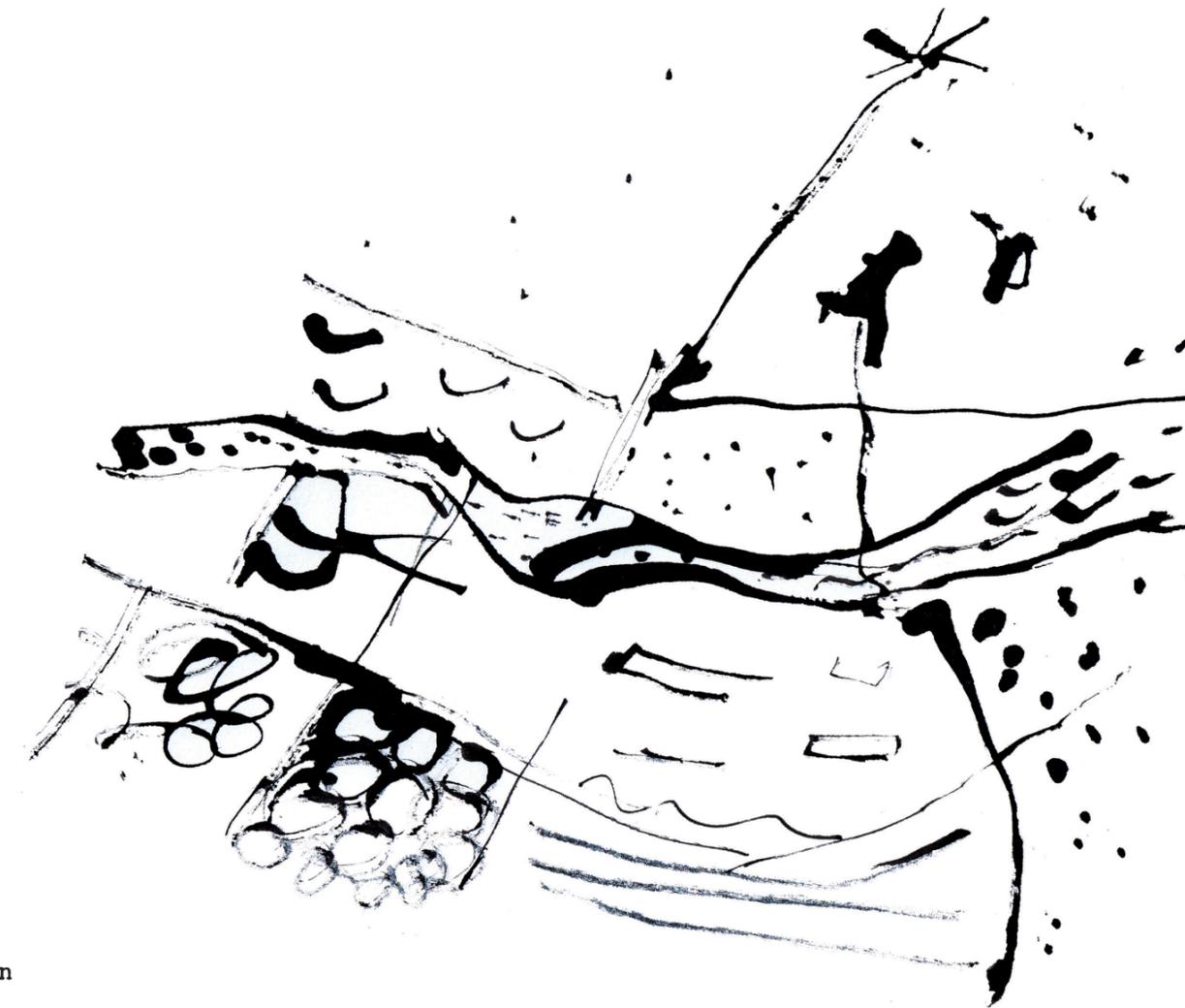


100 Story Building

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In the early hours of 14 October 2022, the Maribyrnong River broke its banks, impacting about 500 properties and displacing hundreds of people.

Nearly three years on, many within the community are still displaced, repairing and rebuilding. This includes some of the young authors involved in telling this story.

The idea for this book came from the Maribyrnong community workshop. It was born from the desire to tell their collective stories and enable young people to contribute to the story in a way that empowers them.

This book was created by six young people.

Over four workshops, they shared their experiences in a safe, supported environment, selected the characters, and made content decisions about what should go on each page. They also worked with the illustrator to ensure the imagery effectively tells the story.

This story is based on their lived experiences.

It is a story by the young people of Maribyrnong, for the whole community. It is a story of pain and hardship, but it is also a story of great strength and the power of connection.

This book is yours and dedicated to each of you.