



IT REALLY STRUCK ME
ONE DAY... THAT NO
ONE WAS USING NATIVE
AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
IN SKINCARE



GAYLE HERON

PHOTOGRAPH TRAVIS DE CLIFFORD



Twenty years ago a photography teacher decided to find out whether or not native, Australian plants could be used in the formulation of effective skincare products. It was the beginning of a wonderful journey for Gayle Heron and it wasn't until 10 years later that she felt she had enough information to begin. No sooner had she developed her own skincare range than she embarked on an even greater challenge, to uncover the ancient healing practices of the Aboriginal people of Australia and take them to spas all over the world. Her teacher was a spiritual man and philosopher, a doctor of Ya-idthmidung medicine, a 'Keeper of the Law', a 'Cleverman', poet and songman called Kakkib li'Dthia Warrawee'a. The resulting brand, LI'TYA, is the legacy of her journey and his teachings. LI'TYA's range of potent skincare products and indigenous-inspired, holistic healing rituals can be experienced in some of the most luxurious spas around the world; from the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, to Huvafen Fushi in the Maldives and Puka Park in New Zealand. Here's Gayle's story... Df

Df Can you give me a quick overview of where LI'TYA is at now?

Gayle We're growing really rapidly having opened our first concept spa in St Kilda (Melbourne) just over a year ago. We're now seeing the benefits of our continuing hard work. We're also in the process of opening another LI'TYA Spa Dreaming concept spa in Bangkok, Thailand in five months time and have two more scheduled to open in Dublin and Broome. Although the concept spas are not LI'TYA's core business, I wanted to be able to showcase the brand and how it can be presented. The indigenous healing techniques and Australian plant-based products are so unique, it can be slightly daunting for some people. Instead they like to look at using French or other international products. I wanted to be able to introduce the holistic and indigenous aspects, showcase what we could do with LI'TYA and bring in the level of service and professionalism I thought it deserved.

Df The concept spas must also serve as a great training ground for therapists to then go and work for some of your clients.
Gayle Absolutely, our concept spas provide a fantastic opportunity for trainees. Taking this further, we've been working with Melbourne's William Angliss Institute of TAFE for the last two years. LI'TYA offers all students completing a Diploma of Resort Management [Spa] a five-day intensive training session which incorporates many LI'TYA treatments that are all based on indigenous healing techniques. The students adore it and often say that it's the highlight of the course. It's quite interesting because a lot of the students who come out of the course are gaining employment with spas that use LI'TYA immediately after graduation. I think about 90 per cent of last year's graduates are now employed by LI'TYA spas. We're also in discussion with William Angliss to advance our involvement in the education side of the business. It's a very exciting development and will provide a fabulous training ground for indigenous therapies and work within the healing/preventative medicines area.

Df You said that the concept spas aren't your core business. What do you see as the core business?

Gayle LI'TYA's core business is the manufacture and distribution of our wholesale spa product and the treatments that go with them. We aim to be in the top of the spa market so the locations are beautiful and have the resources to ensure that the brand, philosophy and treatments are given the integrity and attention to detail they deserve.

*Indigenous,
holistic healing needs to be embraced in its
entirety,*

meaning time must be taken to complete thorough training in the product, treatment and philosophy. It's not just about a certain technique or ingredient, it's about a belief, it's about an understanding of how the body works and it's about your relationship with yourself, the planet and other people. We teach every therapist who learns our



*By four

LI'TYA's philosophy stems from that of the Ya-idt'midtung people of North-Eastern Victoria and the Western Kosciusko region of New South Wales, Australia. Their philosophy is called Kirridth Yordtharrngba, it is a way of life. It is not static and set in stone, but will keep evolving as it has done for tens of thousands of years.

Its foundations are the four tenets briefly outlined here. For a more comprehensive explanation read Kakkib li'Dthia Warrawee'a's book 'There once was a tree called Deru'.

1 AILDT

Everything is One.

Everything and every person is inextricably linked as part of one creative force, universal soul or vitality known as Aildt. As all thoughts, words, actions, animate and inanimate objects impart their own energy or vibration upon the earth to form the ongoing creation of the world, everything tangible and intangible is One.

2 ADTOMON

Truth is the path.

By living in harmony with own truth, being true to the universe, true to each other and respecting the interconnectedness of all things, we find the true gift of nature and secure health and wellbeing.

3 DTWONDTYEN

A varied perspective is the key to perception.

While your truth and my truth are not the same, each person's truth is equally valid. Therefore it is important to respect that someone else's truth is as valid as your own as acceptance of varied perspectives is the key to perception.

4 LINJ

Now is the moment of your being.

Presence is deep within every form as our essential nature. When we start living in the now, time melts and our true essence is revealed. Live now, in this moment, for now is the moment of your being, this is where energy is.



techniques and uses our products the same philosophy that was taught to me by Kakkib li'Dthia Warrawee'a, an Aboriginal elder. It's based on four tenets (*see page 40 *By Four*) and provides the therapists with tools for their own life as well as their work environment. We're probably the only spa or product company in the world that actually teaches therapists how to deal with the energy when you're in a one-on-one situation with a complete stranger. The spa environment is quite intimate and when you're giving the client a treatment you're working with their energy. It's important to know what to do to ensure both the therapist's and client's comfort.

Df No small undertaking.

Gayle No it's not, but one of the things I'm always humbled by and really pleased about is that

*we can take
an element of the indigenous way and incorporate
it into something that's very modern and relevant*

to today's world. Aboriginal philosophy has evolved for more than 40,000 years and it's what indigenous people used to live by - that understanding of their place on the planet as custodians. It's something that is known to work, that we can learn from the original inhabitants of this country and that we can put it into everyday life. It's not a dot painting, it's not a didgeridoo, it's something that's relevant to everyday life and that we can all learn from. I'm really pleased that LITYA can take part in that.

Df I know that it's not only the spas, the treatments and therapies that you base on the traditional Aboriginal philosophies, but also the way you run your business.

Gayle Yes, yes. LITYA has a 'tread lightly' philosophy which also comes from Kakkib li'Dthia's teachings (*see page 51 *The truth about everything*). Our aim is to have as little an impact on the environment as we possibly can. We use all recycled and recyclable materials wherever possible. When you're packing jars, tubes and bottles and sending them all around the world, the packaging has to be sturdy and secure to ensure that the products arrive in one piece. We have specifically sourced biodegradable bubble-wrap which dissolves in water and corn-based filler chips. Everything we do is about being conscious of the environment. We buy all of our native Australian plants from IAF (Indigenous Australian Foods) which is a cooperative set up between about 20 different Aboriginal communities around Australia that grow indigenous plants. We try to be really careful and transparent in everything we do and the product is as pure as we can make it using botanical bases. We even process our native plants as we need them rather than making a tincture. The traditional way of processing plant extracts is to make a tincture where the nut/berry/seed/leaf is soaked in alcohol or glycerine and left to sit for years. The nutrients leach out into the alcohol and that's called a tincture. I think

*you get more vitality from the plant if the extract is
made just before it is needed.*

Df What's your vision for LITYA?

Gayle I believe that LITYA can be one of the foremost spa care product and treatment companies in the world. The vision is to take the products and treatments to top-level spas throughout the world. The way we've grown to date has been quite reactive - people have enquired and then we've gone into their spas. We have a smattering of spas, some great ones like

the MGM Grand in Las Vegas and Huvafen Fushi in the Maldives.

Df There's a beautiful irony in having products like yours in an environment like the MGM Grand.

Gayle To have the product and teachings in such a glitzy environment is really good. It provides a wonderful opportunity for us to bring Australia's indigenous culture and native plant knowledge into the heart of places you wouldn't expect it. We've got some beautiful accounts in the United States, Germany, England, Austria, the Maldives and we're just about to open in Dubai, but we've got more to do. It's all very exciting.

Df And I believe you've also started a foundation to return some of the profits back to Aboriginal communities.

Gayle Yes, we put aside some of our money from each sale we make. I was talking to one of the Aboriginal elders a few years ago and she said to me, "You know, there's a lot of funds out there for us to assimilate into the white community; there's funds for us to go to university, or to start a footy team, or things like that, but there's not much funding for us to strengthen our own communities, learn our own languages and learn our own culture which is being lost." I believe this is really important so we try to direct our funds towards activities that promote indigenous cultural learning.

Df That's wonderful. Tell me, what were you doing before you started all this?

Gayle I was actually teaching photography at RMIT (The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) and working with a video production unit. It was very different to this, but

my father used to formulate for major skincare houses when I was younger

so it was something that I was quite aware of all my life. It really struck me one day, a long time ago actually, probably 20 years ago, that no one was using native Australian plants in skincare. So I said to my dad, "Wouldn't it be fantastic to create a skincare range using Australian plants?", and he said, "Well you find out about the native Australian plants and I'll teach you about formulating". I realised I had the hard job because there was not much knowledge of Australian plants at all. I had two young children at this stage, Aphra and Jesse, so when I was at RMIT for teaching, in my breaks I'd go to the State Library [of Victoria] and study papers. I also worked with a couple of people doing theses at uni. After 10 years of that part-time, I thought I had enough information to bring out a basic range. My first interest was really in the native plants and then I thought, well actually, I'm really not happy about how the Aboriginal people have been marginalised in this country, so maybe I can do something if I put some funds aside. It was my intention right from the word go that for every product I sold I'd put something aside for the indigenous people. It was through that that I ended up getting to meet elders and very interesting indigenous people. I met people who were talking about healing techniques and there was a story that was told to me about a guy who used to work in Japan who had said that

the healing techniques of shiatsu were very similar to what he'd seen the Aboriginal people do

in the Western Desert. I was really interested. I first started asking, "Do you do massage?" I'd get a blank, "No, no". Then I thought, well maybe it's not called massage. Then I started asking, "Do you touch for healing?", "Oh yes".

Df Was that when you met Kakkib li'Dthia?



**I've got your back* by Mary Nguyen

I used to share a room with my sister. We'd push our beds together and whisper late into the night. My favourite thing we used to do was take turns are drawing on each other's backs. It started off with writing words which the other person had to guess, and then progressed to pictures and always ended with just general back scratching! There was a digital clock inbuilt in the bedhead which was watched closely in order to declare it was time to switch turns.

Much older now (with my very own room!) I still relish in the feeling of my back being touched. Massages are the ultimate relaxation and loving strokes are the ultimate intimacy. I read once in my horoscope that my back zone was important because of the emotional effects it had: when in optimal shape is where I gathered my strength

from; but in contrast it was also the area was I mostly absorb stress.

John Sarno writes about one cause of back pain, Tension Myositis Syndrome (TMS). Basically, he says that the stresses of our minds result in real physical disorder, affecting muscles, nerves and tendons. The mind tricks you into not facing repressed emotion by making you focus on pain in the body. When this realisation sinks in, the trick doesn't work anymore and there's no need for the pain. [Note: His technique should not be used for self-diagnosis & chronic back pain should be tended to by a doctor.]

Touch is one of the oldest known medical treatments known in the world. Throughout the world massage, derived from the Arabic word 'mass'h', has been used in different forms to enhance health and healing. Hippocrates said

"rubbing can bind a joint that is too loose, and loosen a joint that is too rigid". The Japanese developed a unique form called Shiatsu, shi meaning finger and 'atsu' meaning pressure. Native Americans used heat and massage with herbs to treat many things, such as easing the labour pains of women.

The ancient Greeks developed techniques to help athletes keep their bodies in the best conditions for competition. Greek women combined massage with aromatic oils, using them as a beauty treatment for the skin and face.

All that history to the simple act of touching. My sister and I would often fall asleep drawing on each other's backs. The feeling then, as is now, of great comfort and release; relieved that someone's there watching, protecting and watching my back.

Gayle Yes, meeting him was fantastic because he said, “Yes absolutely we heal through touch”. He comes from the Ya-idt’midtung people and was very fortunate in that he was never removed from his parents and they were never removed from their parents so they passed down all of their knowledge to him. When he was aged seven they took him up the bush and started teaching him some of the lore and the way things worked. Whereas there are a lot of Aboriginal people who have lost their understanding because when we came here 200 years ago we stuck them on missions, we separated families from each other and we washed their mouths out with soap for speaking their own language. I said to Kakkib li’Dthia, “I’ve got this plant knowledge and I’ve got these products, but wouldn’t it be fantastic to incorporate the philosophy and healing techniques and create an Australian spa brand with all of that involved?” He said that he would teach me so I paid him and spent a lot of time with him. We’d go into the bush. He would walk and I would follow him. He would talk and

that’s how I learnt. Just by following him through the bush.

Df Which would have been how he was taught too. How long did you spend with him?

Gayle I would go and spend long weekends with him and then come back to my life and then I’d go back.

Df You mentioned that you were paying him... You had two kids. Were you still teaching to fund all this?

Gayle I’d brought out a range of skincare products called Baiame with the plant knowledge that I had and I put that into the... gift market I suppose. I launched it at Georges, a beautiful store in Melbourne, and at Husk and places like that. I ran Baiame from home. By this stage we’ve actually leapt a few years. I had two young children when I was doing all the research, but then I remarried and had another two children so I’ve got four children. It was while I had the second two that I brought out the skincare products. I wasn’t working then and I thought, this is my time to really put my energies into making this happen. Billie, my 12 year-old, was a baby then. I started at home in my front room. I was just really determined to be around when they were little and be with them when they needed me, but when I got the opportunity, like whenever she was sleeping, I worked. I spent a lot of time up at night in the early days. I remember writing brochures at two o’clock in the morning. But I had a passion, I was really determined and I really wanted to do it. So that’s what funded me being able to pay Kakkib li’Dthia.

Df Where did the name LITYA come from?

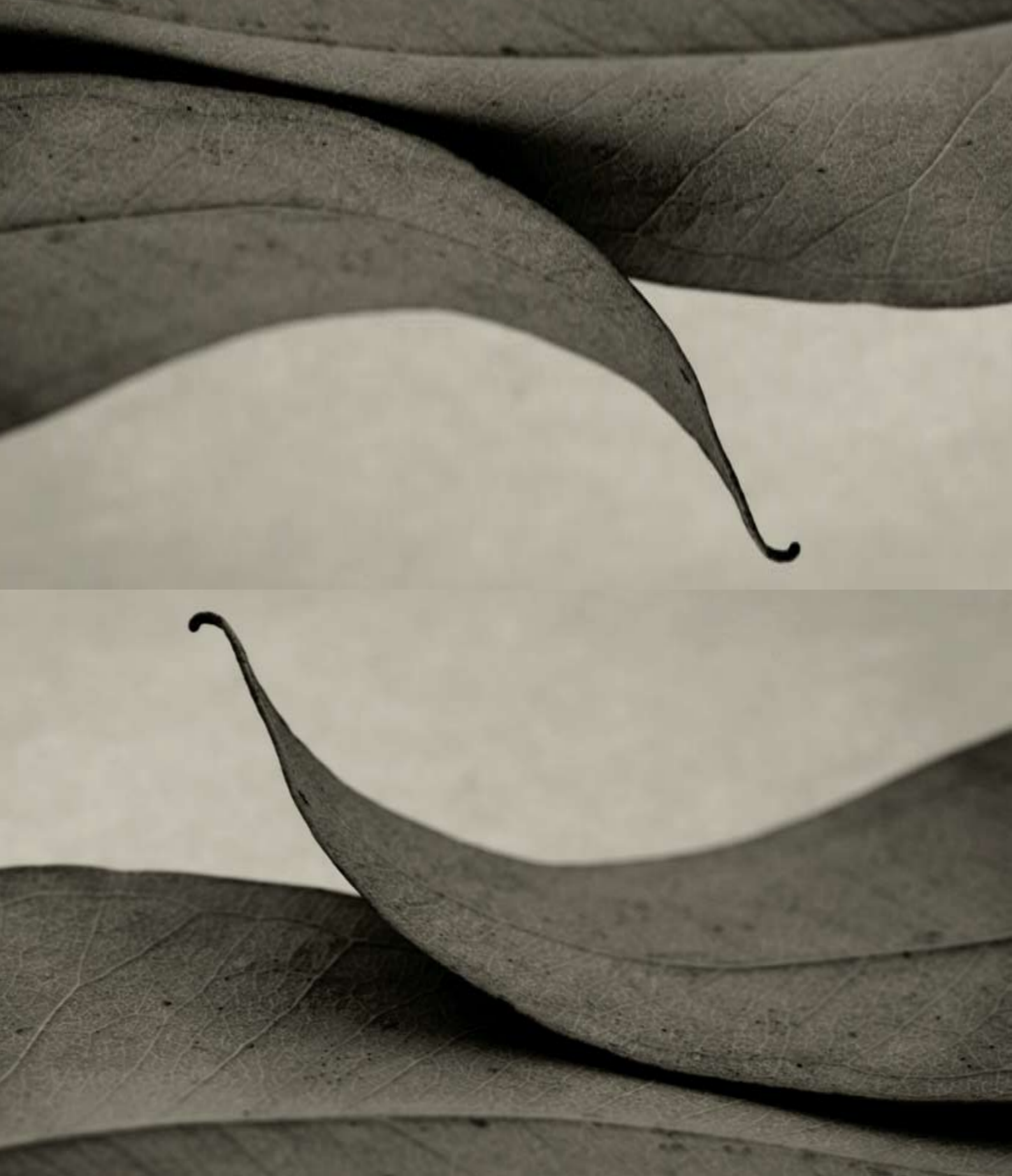
Gayle I had an Aboriginal name book which I was looking through and found this name ‘li’tya’. The description was ‘the earth at flowering time’ and I thought that was really cute. The next time I went up to see Kakkib li’Dthia we were just walking and I said, “I’ve found this name, it’s li’tya” and I pronounced the ‘t’ like a ‘t’. He asked, “How do you spell it?” I spelt it out and he said, “Well you don’t pronounce the ‘t’ as a ‘t’, it’s like ‘d’. It doesn’t really mean the earth at flowering time, it means ‘of the earth’.” Then he became serious and said, “And you can use it with my blessing.” I said thank you and sort of turned around to walk off, and he said, “Hang on a minute, you know it’s the last part of my name don’t you?” I hadn’t even twigged. I had not even twigged. It was ridiculous. Kakkib li’Dthia.

Df Of course.

Gayle So there you go, it’s amazing how it just happens. I thought, this is a good path. He made me learn the healing, not just the massage techniques, which I found quite a challenge because I’m not a masseur, but I’m really glad that he did because now I know exactly how it works. The way Kakkib li’Dthia taught the basic healing teaching was that you had to be naked and you had to be on the ground and the therapist had to be naked too. Everyone was naked for the balance of power and he said, “This is the way it has to be done”. I said to him, “It’s not going to work. We’re not going to be able



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to do that. I'm going to have to take the basis of it and then entwine it into something that will fit into the modern day world". So that's what I did. I actually had someone come and work with me then who was heaven-sent, a beautiful girl. She used to work in the spa industry, knew a lot about healing, a lot about treatments and she taught me a lot about how to put treatments together. She spent a lot of time with Kakkib li'Dthia as well and we put the treatments together that we now use and teach. We've incorporated the indigenous healing techniques as Kakkib li'Dthia taught them to us, but we've had to modify them to fit into a modern day understanding of what treatments are and what can be done in a spa environment with oils and steam... It is interesting because even in the old days, the Aboriginal people used to use steam. They would make these really crude tables out of twigs and then they'd build a pit under it... they even had a gap for your face.

They'd light a fire in the pit and use aromatic leaves and steam and smoke for healing.

In our schooling we never learned things like that about the indigenous people. I've learned huge amounts about the depth of the culture.

Df And I'm sure there's even more there that we haven't tapped into yet.

Gayle Oh yes, absolutely.

Kakkib li'Dthia would say, "You guys treated us like children so we gave you children's stories."

I am often asked, "Why hasn't someone done something like this before?" He's very clear with me. He says, "There are other elders who would say that I shouldn't share this with you. Why should we share with the white people? If we'd tried to teach this stuff to you 200 years ago you would have laughed at us, but I think there's been a change in consciousness in the last few years and I think it's time. I don't think we should die with all this knowledge, I think it should go on."

Df Why do you think he chose to share it with you?

Gayle I don't know, he's said he's been asked before, but he just felt that this was the right time. The one thing is that it's quite a responsibility and I have to treat it with the integrity that it deserves. He was really quite strong with me about ensuring that it doesn't turn into a gimmick, or get bastardised and changed around, or not be treated with the reverence that it deserves. This is where the five star or top end of the spa market really works better because they have the resources and time to commit to thoroughly learning about the benefits and power of native plant botanicals within the range and the philosophy and techniques behind the healing rituals. The environments are always calm and beautiful and set in nature so it is a really nice place to bring out something that's got so much connectedness to the Australian earth and spirit.

Df Is Kakkib li'Dthia still with us, is he still around?

Gayle He is although he's not very well.

Df Does he know where you've managed to take LI'TYA?

Gayle I talk to him often, so yes, he knows exactly where we're at. He's not very well. He's contracted Berylliosis which is a lung

disease. He fought in the Vietnam War.

Df Was it like Agent Orange?

Gayle A bit like that. I don't know a whole lot except that he's not very well now which is very difficult, but he's still with us at the moment so that's good.

Df He has a wonderful legacy which will live on in what you do and the people you touch.

Gayle It's great isn't it. There have been so many people blessed with his teachings. When some of the therapists come to our training, the ability to embrace the teaching that comes from our land, rather than looking to India or Asia or somewhere else, changes their lives. It's just so right, it feels right, it sits well with them. We have therapists who have been working with LI'TYA right from the onset. They travel from spa to spa and it is their life.

Df Do you have a great team?

Gayle I run a successful business and I think you have to have a good team to do that. It's been such a learning curve for me running this business. I have 15 employees at the moment and it's really important that they first understand the philosophy and the tenets and the essence of what the business is about. Then secondly, that they have a really good attitude and energy. We are doing something worthy here with LI'TYA so they must share that same vision and passion. I really do have a great team.

Df Was LI'TYA more readily accepted overseas than in Australia when you first started out?

Gayle It was and still is more accepted in the international market. However, gradually it is getting much more easily accepted here, particularly at the top end of the market. To the overseas market Aboriginal Australia is seen as exotic and very unique, almost like the last frontier. Unlike Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shiatsu and Ayurveda, Australian indigenous healing modalities are new, especially to the spa market. However Australia is starting to embrace and respect the indigenous culture as we learn more about their ancient traditions and their relationship with the natural world. I think that as the Western world becomes more conscious of the environment and the importance of health and wellbeing, the Aboriginal way of life will resonate with people more.

Df Such a lot of that terminology was quite foreign to us 10 years ago. Why do you think there's been such a rush to embrace spa culture in recent years? Why is it becoming more and more popular and mainstream?

Gayle I think that we're all so time poor, so driven, so pressured to achieve that we are so removed from nature. Computers, mobile phones, iPods, that energy, all of the electrical buzz that's around us all the time... we need to balance it out somehow. The intensity of our environment means that for us to try to remain balanced, we need to find ways to tap back into the source. The beauty of spa is that you can go and have a treatment for half a day or even an hour and come out feeling rejuvenated, refreshed, nurtured and cared for, whereas we used to have to take two weeks holiday to achieve the same result. I believe that we take more responsibility for our bodies now. We are more aware that we are responsible for our own wellbeing. The prevalence of preventative medicine has increased dramatically. If we want to feel well and healthy, we need to get our bodies back into balance. The other thing is that

the ancient

methodologies are a way of getting back to the earth and the core.

A lot of the synthetic-derived cosmetic materials and treatments that have come from within the beauty market just remove us further from the earth, or from the animal essence I suppose, I don't know. There's the natural core and we all need to acknowledge that in our lives. The ancient treatments that have evolved



*The truth about everything

By Kate Bezar

Some 14-15,000 years ago a great Aboriginal spiritual teacher whose name was Kakkib Dtoom'dtoomm commenced a lineage of reincarnation that continued for seven generations before dividing his soul into four separate individuals. These were the four Kaia Kakkib, each of whom continued their lineage until, in the early-mid 19th Century, due to the massacres of Aboriginal people's and the introduction of disease, three lines were destroyed. The sole survivor was the Kaia Kakkib of the south. Gayle Heron's teacher, is of this lineage. At some point the name was changed to Kaia Kakkib of the earth; li'Dthia.

Photography Tim Georgeson

A Kaia Kakkib is regarded as a very holy person, similar to a Buddhist tulka. The role is not only of spiritual teacher but also of 'chief philosopher'. Kakkib li'Dthia's people, the Ya-idt'midtung, gathered many philosophical ideas from the various tribes who would come to their lands every Summer to feast on a particularly delicious moth - which tastes rather like peanut butter apparently. These philosophies were gathered, discussed and where appropriate, incorporated into the current thinking of the day. The name Ya-idt'midtung means 'the people who know the truth'.

When he was first asked to write a book, Kakkib li'Dthia faced a

dilemma. What to write about? In 'There once was a tree called deru's introduction he says that he 'resolved the problem by deciding to write about everything...'. The word deru of the title comes from an old Indo-European word from which 'true' and 'truth' are derived. The book is about everything in the sense that it is about 'seeing things whole and deriving some sort of understanding or meaningfulness from that holism.' Somewhat surprisingly this hasn't resulted in a dauntingly large tome and instead it's a relatively compact and engaging book, the product of a true storyteller, and the generations of philosophers and tellers-of-stories who have gone before.

over many thousands of years have an understanding of how to tap into the body's energy system and how to get body balance and healing that actually works. I think the reason that people are actually getting more and more involved in spa treatments is that they need that touch (*see page 45 *I've got your back*), they need that healing, they need that nurturing. It's great to eat well, it's great to think well, it's great to exercise, but we also need to be pampered, nurtured and looked after too.

Df Do you take much time to pamper and nurture yourself?

Gayle I try, I try, not enough, but I try.

I always want it all; I've got children, I've got animals, I've got a business

and all these wonderful things in my life and it's go, go, go... My weekends are sacrosanct. I spend my weekends with them. My daughter Aphra who works with me, has just given birth to my first grandson, a beautiful little boy named Oscar, and it was so special being there with her at the birth and helping her through it. Those are the things that are priceless. I just love all that. I do take care of my life in that I have really strong family values and I adore my animals and my kids and live in a beautiful environment. I want true value in my life and things aren't fulfilling if you don't do them well. I need to be able to run the business with integrity and make sure that we're making a positive, strong and good impact in all that we do. That's the way I believe I should live my life too. I always want to do the right thing by my family and with my animals and by everything I am involved in. So in that way I do nurture myself yes. Like this morning I was walking along the beautiful ocean beach nearby. I take the dogs down and it's just such a gift to be able to do that and then go to work.

Df It is a gift, but anyone can do it... Maybe not everyone lives by the beach, but there'll be some equivalent. It's just about making it a priority.

Gayle I just believe in doing the best we can and making the most of what we have. I think it's a waste of the precious gift of life if we don't.

Df How do you cope when things get tough as I'm sure they have?

Gayle I'm a very determined person and what happens for me is when things get tough I really dig my heels in. There have been tough times – one of my sons had a terrible accident and was in a critical condition with traumatic brain injuries for two weeks and a coma for a month – but it's a matter of getting through and working with the best of the energies around. One of my beliefs is that every single one of us comes across good times and bad times, but

it's how you deal with those bad times that determines whether or not you're going to be successful,

or whether you're actually going to get there or not. It's not the good times, it's the bad times, when you've got to be really mindful of doing the right thing and being able to keep going and push your way through it. It's one of my really core beliefs, that when things get tough, I just have to breathe deeply, keep forging through and have a strong belief in what we're trying to achieve. I embrace the philosophies I have been taught and work with good energy to try to achieve positive outcomes. 🌿

